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# March's Gendered Madness: An Analysis of Print Media Representations of a Female Division I NCAA Women's Basketball Coach - Pat Summitt

Cindy Marie Allen

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MARCH'S GENDERED MADNESS:  
AN ANALYSIS OF PRINT MEDIA REPRESENTATIONS  
OF A FEMALE DIVISION I NCAA WOMEN'S BASKETBALL COACH—

PAT SUMMITT

by

CINDY ALLEN

Under the Direction of Michael Lane Bruner

ABSTRACT

This study explores the extent to which national newspaper coverage of a successful female coach reflects the broader gender ideology of society. This study looks specifically at the *New York Times*, *The Washington Post* and *USA Today's* coverage of six Women's Division I national basketball tournaments in which Pat Summitt coached the University of Tennessee in the championship game. The years included for analysis are 1996, 1997, 1998, 2000, 2003 and 2004. This rhetorical analysis examines this print coverage of Summitt to determine if, consistent with previous research on media coverage of the female athlete, Summitt's traditional gender role is privileged over her coaching role. The results suggest that Summitt is characterized in ways that marginalize and trivialize her coaching accomplishments. The findings also suggest that even as women succeed in the male-dominated world of sport, societal pressures require that they be presented as properly gendered heterosexual females.

INDEX WORDS: Pat Summitt, Female athletes, Gender stereotypes, Female coaches, Women's basketball, College basketball, Media coverage, Lesbians and sport, Title IX

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A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts  
College of Arts and Sciences  
Georgia State University

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2006

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## INTRODUCTION

Because of the historic passage of the federal civil rights legislation Title IX some 30 years ago, girls and young women now have unprecedented access to athletics. Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 is the Federal law prohibiting discrimination on the basis of sex in education programs, including sports programs, by any school receiving federal financial assistance. “It has been the primary vehicle for asserting the right of women and girls to equal opportunity in high school and college athletics, and has played a vital role in opening competitive sports to female athletes ...” (Brake & Catlin 51). The result is that today more girls and young women play and excel in sports of every kind, at all levels, than ever before, while national awareness and media coverage of women’s sport continue to grow. As new opportunities are created and women become interested in sport, the level of female athletic competency and achievement increases.

As schools began to create women’s athletic programs in response to Title IX, participation by female students in organized sports soared, increasing by 600% at the high school level between 1971 and 1978. Women’s athletic participation at the college level also sustained huge increases. In 1971, prior to the enactment of Title IX, less than 32,000 women played varsity sports at the college level. In 1993-94, over 105,000 college women competed in NCAA sports (Brake & Catlin 29). Unfortunately, implementation of Title IX has also resulted in a loss of coaching and administrative positions for women. In 1972, 90% of women’s intercollegiate teams were coached by women. Today, although the number of female coaches has increased, roughly 48% of women’s teams are coached by women (Acosta & Carpenter, cited in Jones 18). As a result, opportunities for women to participate in sport in some economically viable way after college are minimized. Of course the Women’s National Basketball Association (WNBA) allows the opportunity for women to play basketball

professionally in the United States (and, at present, it is the only professional *team* sport for women).

Perhaps more importantly, women competing in collegiate sports have fewer female coaching role models—subtly communicating that coaching is not a gender-appropriate vocation for a woman/female athlete. And since female athletes have minimal opportunity to turn a passion for sports into an income producing venture, sending such a message functions to limit sport-related opportunities for women. The underlying message seems to be that once out of college, women should put sports behind them and get on with more gender-appropriate activities.

While Title IX has had the effect of increasing the level of competition in women's sports over the past three decades, an entirely separate issue concerns how these changes have been presented and represented in the media. The overarching message in previous studies on portrayals of female athletes by the media suggest there are many ways that the media communicates to its audience that a woman's gender role is more salient than her athletic role. Consequently, the media serves to reinforce the status quo in terms of gender privilege and hierarchy in our society. As the review of the literature in this study demonstrates, in coverage that is devoted to women's sports, female athletes are far more likely than men to be depicted in sexualized terms, in hyper-feminized terms and outside the range of their actual athletic accomplishments. This persistent tendency to sexualize, trivialize and marginalize physically strong, athletic women has the effect of undermining the power of female athletes and works to contain the threat this power poses to hegemonic masculinity. In my examination of Pat Summitt's coverage in the *New York Times*, *The Washington Post* and *USA Today*, I found a tendency to sexualize (specifically heterosexualize), trivialize or somehow marginalize Summitt's coaching prowess in similar ways to how female athletes have been heterosexualized,

trivialized and marginalized.

Despite—or perhaps because of—the increased cultural presence and visibility of women’s athletic ability, it is arguably the case that media coverage continues to represent female athletes, and women’s sports, through the restrictive lens of gender stereotypes. Many argue that by continuing to feature and pay far more attention to men’s sports and male athletes, and by focusing on stereotypes of traditional femininity in their limited coverage of female athletes, media producers reveal much about the relationship of sport to long held cultural definitions of masculinity and femininity (Billings, Halone & Denham 2000; Blinde, Greendorfer & Shanker 1991; Daddario 1992; Eastman & Billings 1999; 2000; Fink & Kensicki 2002; Hargreaves 1994; Jones, Murrell & Jackson 1999; Messner 1994; Messner, Duncan & Cooky 2003; Messner, Duncan & Jensen 1993; Tuggle & Owen 1999). Since sports culture is likely one of the key places where ideals and norms of femininity and masculinity get defined and maintain themselves, it is important to investigate how the exposure to women’s physical strength, power and athleticism threatens basic definitions and traditional notions of masculinity and femininity and consequently problematizes society’s dominant ideology of men’s “natural” superiority over women. Examining how the media portray women in sports is a way to shed light on these issues.

My study contributes to the current research on media coverage of female athletes by examining media representations of a highly successful female women’s basketball coach in an effort to determine if the same media biases exist for the female coach as for female athletes. This study extends the research done on media representations of women in sport because none of the research thus far has focused on media representations of successful female coaches in order to explore the ways in which their portrayals may reinforce gender stereotypes. I have examined print media representations of the most successful female NCAA Division I women’s

basketball coach—Pat Summitt, head coach of University of Tennessee women’s basketball—in an effort to determine if the same media biases appear for the female coach that do for the female athlete. The overarching message in previous studies on portrayals of female athletes by the media suggest that there are many ways that the media communicates to its audience that a woman’s gender role is more salient than her athletic role. Consequently, this topic is important to explore because the media reinforce, reflect and perpetuate hegemonic notions of acceptable gender roles for women, thereby supporting a gender hierarchy that privileges men over women. The fact that Pat Summitt is now the winningest coach, male or female, of all time makes her an especially interesting subject for a study of this sort. Because Summitt’s coaching success cannot be denied in terms of achievement, the ways in which these newspapers potentially marginalize her achievement are important because of the ways they might reinforce the society’s dominant message that a woman’s proper gender role is more important than whatever other roles she may occupy.

This study looks specifically at the national newspaper coverage of six Women’s Division I national basketball tournaments in which Pat Summitt and the University of Tennessee (UT) played in the championship game. The first three of these championships—1996, 1997 and 1998—were won by UT while UT lost the most recent three—2000, 2003 and 2004. I chose the Women’s Final Four basketball tournament and these championship games for study because the tournament receives substantially more press coverage in the national print media than does women’s college basketball in general. I elected to look at the national print coverage of these games because such coverage provides an opportunity to examine how the national print media frame a female coach (one of the top coaches of all time in any sport) and a women’s team sporting event aimed at a general audience who may have little knowledge of the abilities of the players and coaches. Because reader knowledge may be limited to what they

garner from these media outlets, how the media portray the event can greatly influence the audiences' response to the event and its participants. I analyzed the print media's coverage of these six tournaments in three newspapers—*The New York Times*, *USA Today* and *The Washington Post*. I chose these three newspapers because they are three of the most widely read and distributed newspapers and they are the three national newspapers that provided the most print coverage of these games.

I analyzed all of the stories containing Pat Summitt's name from March 15-April 16 for each of the six years in this study because this time frame—known as “March Madness”—is when both the men's and women's NCAA Division I national championship tournaments are played. “March Madness” results in heightened media attention for collegiate basketball because the resulting Final Four is presented to the public in similar ways to other sporting events like the Super Bowl, World Series and Olympics as “must see” events (Messner, Duncan & Wachs 1996). While the general public usually associates the Final Four with men's basketball, the Women's Final Four takes place concurrently and in recent years has been presented as a more important event than in the past. Because coverage of women's collegiate basketball is heightened during this tournament, this particular time frame is ideal for examining women's collegiate basketball coverage in general and Pat Summitt's coverage in particular. Summitt's team, the University of Tennessee Lady Vols, was in the championship game in each of the six years examined in this study. “March Madness” is one of the few times that national newspaper coverage of women's sports is more visible to the general public and this increased coverage of women's college basketball provided an opportunity to review the articles mentioning Summitt in an effort to explore how her portrayals compare to those of female athletes.

Pat Summitt has coached the University of Tennessee women's basketball team for

31 years, garnering 16 Final Four appearances, six National Championships—1987-1988, 1989-1990, 1991-1992, 1996-1997, 1997-1998, 1998-1999 and four AIAW Final Four Championships (the pre-Title IX national championship for women's basketball). Her overall win-loss record is 882-172 (.838). Her numerous accolades include: 1) being named the *Naismith College Coach of the Year* four times; 2) being named *NCAA Coach of the Year* seven times; 3) being named the *Women's Basketball Coaches Association Coach of the Year* four times; and 4) in 2000, being named *Naismith Coach of the Century*. Additionally UT women's basketball was voted *ESPY's Team of the Decade for the 1990s* in a tie with Florida State University Football. As her accomplishments reveal, Summitt is one of the top coaches in women's basketball today and one of the most successful coaches (male or female) in any sport. Summitt's level of achievement makes her an ideal candidate for analysis because her stature is on par with an elite athlete.

While sport is used to sell newspapers and sports coverage serves to create interest and demand for sport, promote athletes and develop heroes and heroines, I agree with Cohen (2001) who argues that sport and the media function together as “conservators of convention” to reinforce traditional norms and values rather than challenging the status quo (232-3). Further, sport heroines (like Summitt) are presented in a variety of ways (some quite subtle) that communicate to us all that a woman's traditional gender role always trumps her athletic role. Included in this proper gender role is heterosexuality. Female athletes, particularly those in gender inappropriate sports are pressured by compulsory heterosexuality and this pressure seems to have a tendency for the media, and even the athletes themselves, to assert their heterosexuality in a way that does not seem to be required of males who participate in gender appropriate sports. By insinuating that female athletes could be lesbians, the dominant ideology pressures female athletes into presenting themselves as normal, heterosexual women. Likewise

the media has a tendency to focus on portrayals that characterize women in sport as heterosexually feminine by privileging their gender role over their athletic role. My examination of Summitt by these three national newspapers serves to support these scholars' assertions that even as women succeed in elite athletic and coaching endeavors, societal pressures require that they be presented as properly gendered heterosexual females. And the pressure for the individual female athlete, or in this case coach, is such that Summitt herself contributes to the process of assuring the public of her heterosexuality. These societal pressures serve to preserve the status quo in terms of gender relations particularly in what has traditionally been the domain of men—the world of sports.

## REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Because there is virtually no research on media representations of female coaches, my review will focus on media representations of women's sports and the female athlete. The findings of these studies have influenced my specific research questions and aided in my analysis of the media coverage given to Summitt. I will first provide a general overview of women athletes and their portrayal by the media and then will review the most recent studies and group them in the following sections: day-to-day coverage, Olympic coverage, U.S. Women's National Soccer Team coverage and women's basketball coverage. Most of the recent research on female athlete portrayals by the media has looked at Olympic coverage in some way, probably because the Olympics represent one of the few opportunities for the general public to actually see extensive coverage of women athletes. Women's collegiate basketball (generally Final Four coverage) has been the second-most examined area of women's sports—probably because the tournament garners national media attention and because women's basketball has “succeeded” in that women can now play professionally in the United

States. I will also include two examinations of coverage of the U.S. Women's National Soccer team and its players because these studies speak volumes about the state of coverage for female athletes, particularly those athletes who play what can be perceived as a "gender-inappropriate" team sport. Following Jones, Murrell and Jackson (1999), I maintain that male-appropriate sports emphasize physical contact, action, aggression and teamwork while female-appropriate sports emphasize individuality and traditional feminine traits like aesthetics, grace, balance and beauty. By this standard, soccer is viewed as gender-inappropriate for females, as is basketball.

### General Overview

Boutilier & SanGiovanni (1983) were among the first to address the media's relationship to women in sport in an essay titled, "Sports, Inc.: The Influence of the Mass Media." They state that it is especially important to examine the treatment of women's sport by the various media because "regardless of what is actually happening to the relationship between women and sport, it is the media's treatment and evaluation of that relationship that will shape its direction and content" (183-4). They examined coverage of female athletes in television, newspapers and magazines, and one of their major findings was the relative absence of women athletes in the various media. Media researcher George Gerbner (1978) has labeled the underrepresentation of women in the media "symbolic annihilation," because "erasing women from our view effectively tells us that women are not an important presence in our culture" (Birrell & Theberge 347). Boutilier & SanGiovanni's principal assertion is that the media represent female athletes as heterosexual, feminine women first and as athletes second, while male athletes are portrayed primarily in terms of their athleticism. Framing coverage in this way appears to be in response to the fact that sports participation for females (particularly for more "male-appropriate" sports) is in direct conflict with women's traditional gender roles. As Birrell

and Theberge (1994) assert, “Sport is what boys and men naturally do, and what girls and women ... do at the peril of their own gendered identities” (341).

Many scholars, including Jennifer Hargreaves (1994), view sport as a site of production of an ideology of male superiority. Hargreaves focuses on muscles as an apparently “natural” sign of sex difference and argues that the ideology of masculinity is rooted in images of male muscularity. She notes the irony of muscularity as an image of man’s “natural” superiority, because muscles “are produced by much ‘pumping of iron’ and ingesting of drugs” (153). She argues that “[w]hen ‘masculinity’ and ‘femininity’ are defined and talked about, the automatic assumption is that we all know what the terms are referring to—heterosexual ideals of what it means to be a man and to be a woman” (166). She asserts that “the variety of messages put out by the sports media gives the idea of objectivity some legitimacy, which makes effective the way the media as a whole continue to reproduce popular and specially constructed ideas about what constitutes ‘masculinity’ and ‘femininity’ in sports” (166). Hargreaves’ points demonstrate that a good deal of cultural work must go on to create the illusion that sex differences based in physicality legitimate the “inevitable” superiority of men over women. The social consequence is the reproduction of relations of power that privilege one gender over the other—male athletes are certainly privileged over females in this environment.

Hargreaves, Birrell & Theberge (1994) assert that “[m]edia representations of women in sport [...] can be seen as ideological sites for the production and reproduction of relations of gender that undermine women and privilege men through references to the ‘natural’ differences between them” (356). They focus much of their discussion on homophobia and its relationship to women’s sports, asserting that homophobia is manifested in sport in many different ways, reflecting not only a fear of women’s sexuality but also a fear of the loss of male control of that sexuality. They argue that when women no longer need men for emotional or sexual fulfillment,

the balance of power in gender relations is threatened. In addition,

By “discrediting” all women in sport as lesbians, men can rest assured that their territory is not being invaded by “real” women after all; by mobilizing social prejudices against homosexuality, they may be able to keep the number of women involved in sport to a safe minimum; by creating an atmosphere of danger, they can, through innuendo, effectively prevent individual women from wanting to be involved in sport; and by keeping women from sport, they keep women from discovering the joy and power of their own physicality, as well as remove a potential arena for the development of female solidarity (353).

Hargreaves et. al cite Bobbie Bennett’s (1982) observation, “Calling one a lesbian is . . . not primarily a way to control lesbians. It is a way to control women” (353). By insinuating that female athletes are most likely lesbians, the dominant ideology pressures female athletes into presenting themselves as normal, heterosexual women. As exemplified by several of the players on the U.S. Women’s National Soccer team, some female athletes pose nude in the media or allow themselves to be photographically represented in poses akin to soft porn. Such portrayals send the message that even though women can be great athletes, they are still primarily sex objects and most importantly heterosexual.

A principal concern in my research was to determine if Summitt was portrayed as heterosexually feminine first and coach second. It seems to me that while no one can argue that Summitt is not a great coach, there seems to be an effort by the media to assure us of her heterosexuality. This is accomplished by their continued focus on her relationship with male others. I argue that this tendency is a homophobic response to dealing with a strong, successful woman in a gender-inappropriate vocation. My analysis revealed a tendency for these newspapers to focus on Summitt’s relationships with male others in a way that marginalizes and trivializes

her coaching successes (which are also presented by these same newspapers). What I find most interesting is that in my review of all of the articles in my study, there were no instances of the media focusing on her relationship with female others except her relationship to some of her players. There was absolutely no mention of her relationship to any of her female peers, despite the fact that the majority of the teams she plays have female head coaches. In fact, only four of the thirteen teams to play in the Women's Final Four during the years of my study had male coaches. And this year the Southeastern Conference, the home conference for the Tennessee Lady Vols has only one male coach (Andy Landers) in a conference with 12 teams. From reading all of the stories mentioning Summitt from the *New York Times*, *The Washington Post* and *USA Today* for the time frame of my study, I know that Summitt is good friends with Steve Spurrier, Michael Jordon, Harry Perretta (coach of Villanova) and she is fierce rivals with Geno Auriemma (coach of UConn). I know about her relationship with her father but nothing of her relationship with her mother (who attends games when the father does). I know when she was married and what her husband does for a living; I know how many nets her son has cut down following this or that championship.

Where are the women in her life? Can we not mention her relationship with female peers like Jody Conradt or Tara Vanderveer or any of the other female coaches who happen to have won more games than Geno Auriemma, the male coach framed as her nemesis? Do we not mention them because they are unmarried? Perhaps this focus on Summitt's relationship with male others points directly to Birrell and Theberg's assertions about using the threat of lesbianism to control all women and preserve the "natural" gender superiority of men. And by focusing so much on her rivalry with Geno Auriemma, these media outlets give the impression that these two coaches are far and away the best, effectively minimizing the achievements of other female coaches.

Kane and Greendorfer (1994) thoroughly examined the media's role in accommodating and resisting stereotyped images of women in sport, arguing that, although the presence of women athletes in the media appears to communicate that sportswomen have gained overall social acceptance, "In reality, these 'feminized' images represent a modernized attempt to reinforce traditional stereotypical images of femininity and female sexuality." They also argue that these feminized and sexualized portrayals are simply new variations on very old themes: "media images as a product or tool of patriarchal oppression of women—and their bodies—through an institutionalized socially constructed system of gender roles and values" (28-29). They outline how media portrayals of female athletes serve to reify sexual difference, gender difference, and gender hierarchy, and they argue that such reification serves to maintain the status quo: "a power structure in which males and male athletes are perceived and portrayed as different from (sexual and gender difference) and better than (gender hierarchy) females and female athletes" (30). They provide several examples of Olympic and professional female athletes whose media portrayals are constructed as "bastardized, perhaps even counterfeit version[s] of the 'real' (men's) sport" and argue that by depicting these athletes as "feminized and sexualized others," the media trivialize and undermine their athletic achievements (30-31). The specific studies in this review will offer many examples to support their point.

Kane and Greendorfer also argue that sport is an institution of male dominance and control. As sportswomen become more visible on a national level, their presence represents a fundamental challenge to male power and privilege and, therefore, "those in authority must employ strategies of resistance ... to accommodate this social change without fundamentally altering the balance of power" (33). I argue that this is what is happening in the case of these newspapers' coverage of Pat Summitt. Kane and Greendorfer also introduce "ambivalence," a term used by Duncan and Hasbrook (1988) to explain "how" or the "way in which" media

portrayals of women athletes contain mixed or contradictory messages. According to Kane & Greendorfer, Duncan and Hasbrook's findings indicated that "verbal and visual depictions of sportswomen often combined positive and flattering portrayals with subtly negative suggestions that trivialized or undermined their sports performance" (38). The authors suggest that ambivalence serves another equally important function—"that of allowing those in power to acknowledge (and therefore to accommodate) the social changes that have taken place within the last two decades while simultaneously offering resistance through the maintenance of the status quo" (39). This is important because as female athletes demonstrate their power, strength and athleticism on the field, and consequently bring into question the legitimacy of traditional gender stereotypes, their portrayals by the media off the field as heterosexy females negates or trivializes their athletic success and positions them once again in their "proper" gendered role.

Likewise, Messner (1994) argues that "the media's framing of male and female athletes will continue to present major obstacles for any fundamental challenge to the present commercialized and male-dominant structure of organized athletics," and he describes the female athlete—and her body—as "a contested ideological terrain" (76). He relates the work of Todd Gitlin (1980) to the situation of the female athlete and the media. Gitlin asserts that when a social movement's values become entrenched in a large enough proportion of the population, "the media maintains its veneer of objectivity and fairness by incorporating a watered-down version of the values of the oppositional group. In so doing, the ideological hegemony of the dominant group shifts but is essentially maintained" (74). Messner argues that women in sport are experiencing a similar situation primarily brought about by Title IX. Yes, the media can show images of women in sport who challenge traditional stereotypes, but these portrayals are diluted by the ways in which the media trivialize and marginalize their accomplishments and by the ways in which they feminize and heterosexualize individual athletes/coaches. Further, they

can protect the status quo by choosing to privilege certain female athletes and certain female-appropriate sports over those athletes and sports that present a challenge to the dominant ideology. Gitlin's and Messner's assertions seem to be borne out in the mass media's treatment of Pat Summitt. She is arguably a threat to hegemonic masculinity because she has not only succeeded in the coaching world—a man's world—but is also one of the best coaches ever. That is why I argue that the media, however subtly, attempts to privilege her traditional gender role over her coaching role in an effort to subordinate her and position her in her properly gendered place.

Messner speculates that we are now moving into an era in which female athletes have worked hard enough to attain a certain level of legitimacy and, consequently, "simple media marginalization and trivialization of female athletes appear transparently unfair and prejudicial" (76). He argues that women athletes are increasingly being covered by "objective" reports that do not trivialize their performances, make references to a woman's attractiveness, or posit the superior female athlete as a sex deviant; he states that the dominant ideology is communicated and perpetuated in subtler ways. He presents football as a site that fiercely preserves the dominant ideology that holds sport as *the* male preserve:

Football's mythology and symbolism are probably meaningful and salient on a number of ideological levels: patriotism, militarism, violence, and meritocracy are all dominant themes. But I would argue that football's primary ideological salience lies in its ability, in the face of women's challenges to male dominance, to symbolically link men of diverse ages and socioeconomic backgrounds.

Consider the words of a 32-year-old white professional male whom I was interviewing, "A woman can do the same job I can do—maybe even be my boss. But I'll be damned if she can go out on the field and take a hit from Ronnie

Lott” ... The fact that this man (and perhaps 99% of all U.S. males) probably could not take a hit from the likes of pro football player Ronnie Lott and live to tell about it is really irrelevant, because football as a televised spectacle is meaningful on a more symbolic level. Here individual males are given the opportunity to identify—generically and abstractly—with all men as a superior and separate caste” (71).

Messner’s observation is important on several levels. Not only could the average U.S. male not take a hit from Ronnie Lott, they could neither take a hit from a member of the U.S. Women’s National Rugby Team. The average man or woman could not compete with any professional or elite athlete regardless of the athlete’s sex. So, as Messner says, it is the symbolic identification with the professional athlete (in this case football player)—his virility, strength and power—that is important because men can associate those qualities with themselves on the basis of a shared trait—maleness—and therefore separate and privilege their gender over the female even as they sit on the couch.

The fact that the average man is physically stronger than the average woman misses the point. Using the fact that men are physically stronger than women to legitimate gender hierarchy and gender stereotypes is simply a way to perpetuate the status quo. One way to battle gender stereotypes is for the public to see that athletes and coaches are not just men. It is important for audiences to see that women can be more than their stereotypic roles permit, and that they can succeed in whatever athletic endeavor they are suited to regardless of its gender-appropriateness or regardless of their sexuality. Unfortunately, as evidenced by the studies in my literature review, the media seem intent on reflecting, constructing and portraying female sportswomen in stereotypic ways. In the following sections, I will look at specific studies that address female athletes and their media representation.

### Day-to-Day Coverage

In one of the very few studies to examine everyday sports reporting, “Sportscasting and Sports Reporting: The Power of Gender Bias,” Eastman and Billings (2000) analyzed SportsCenter on ESPN and its counterpart on CNN, Sports Tonight, along with the sports sections of *The New York Times* and *USA Today* over the period from May to September of 1998 to address the extent of women’s sports coverage. Three aspects of the discourse on newspaper sports pages were measured: 1) the number and percentage of photographs including women, men, or other (such as horses, cars, stadiums); 2) the number and percentage of sports-related articles primarily about women or men (including athletes, coaches, jockeys, or teams); and 3) the total number of inches and percentage of space devoted to women’s sports or athletes, men’s sports or athletes, or nongendered topics (199).

Their results revealed “a very high degree of embedded favoritism toward men’s sports and men athletes,” even at times when major women’s sporting events had taken place (208). CNN’s Sports Tonight devoted only 7% of its coverage to female athletes and their respective sports, whereas ESPN’s SportsCenter only devoted 5% to female athletes and their respective sports; about 13% of newspaper space went to women’s sports—*USA Today*’s coverage of women athletes was nearly twice that of *The New York Times* (209). Further, the authors found that “ESPN’s sportscasters disparaged women’s sports by means of more comic or sexy coverage, whereas CNN’s sportscasters offered more thorough coverage with no highly biased choice of stories or negative comments about women’s sports” (209). Eastman and Billings assert that daily sportscasting differs in tone and approach from special coverage like the Olympics and other major events in two main ways: 1) the gap between men’s and women’s sports coverage becomes exponentially larger in day-to-day coverage; and 2) “both the networks and newspapers, and their commentators and writers belittled even the best of

women's athletic events, although they may have done it indirectly by lack of coverage as much as in tone of comments" (208). These findings are important because if the general public does not hear about female athletes and their accomplishments, then those accomplishments do not produce change in traditional gendered notions of sport. Also, if what audiences do see is degraded or trivialized by the commentators who present the information, those viewers might allow that framing to influence their opinion of the athlete or athletic contest. Consequently, the notion that women simply are not legitimate athletes will persist. Similarly, if we are treated to stories about Summitt that heterosexualize her relationship with her male coaching peers, albeit in absurd and comedic ways, her legitimacy as a coach is undermined.

Sports magazines represent another way in which the media reinforce the dominant ideology concerning female athletes and their proper place in our society. Fink and Kensicki (2002) conducted an analysis of both the visual and literal texts of *Sports Illustrated* and *Sports Illustrated for Women* from 1997 to 1999 and found that women continue to be underrepresented, portrayed in traditionally feminine sports, or shown in nonsport-related scenery in both media outlets. The authors posit that "this generally unoffensive, status-quo approach has been continued to maintain marketability to advertisers and to general sports readers" (317). Because these magazines are a subsidiary of TimeLife, Inc. and their main purpose is to create a profit, Fink and Kensicki assert that these magazines are driven by the economics of the marketplace and therefore they "may attempt to package women's sports in gender-appropriate ways that appeal to the seemingly widest audience" (324). As with other media discussed in this literature review, these magazines support the status quo through their portrayals of female athletes. Their study shows that women are still underrepresented within the pages of *Sports Illustrated*, and in many cases the accomplishments of females as athletes are trivialized through nonaction photographs and nonsport-related articles—"most photographs depicted female athletes in

nonsport settings; that is, photographs of female athletes were taken in a setting completely removed from the athletic arena in which they participate” (331). This is important because in distancing the athlete from her sport the media effectively trivializes her athleticism and privileges her gender role over her athletic role.

Though *Sports Illustrated* was not a publication that I specifically examined as part of this study, I did peruse the articles that *Sports Illustrated* produced containing Summitt’s name and found that further examination of these articles could extend my particular study along with the others in my literature review. *Sports Illustrated* wrote a total of 13 articles containing Summitt’s name in the six years encompassing my study (1996, 1997, 1998, 2000, 2003 and 2004). Four of these stories were on the team that defeated her in the national championship—the University of Connecticut. One was a story written by Summitt about the state of Tennessee. Two were only a paragraph long. Though Summitt was the first female coach to be featured on the cover of *Sports Illustrated*, the story focused on the fact that Summitt’s “water broke” and she went into labor while she was at the home of Michele Marceniack, a player that she was recruiting. The reader learns that Summitt immediately flew home and gave birth to a son. This story was also reported in each of the newspapers in my analysis although the event (Summitt’s birth of her son Tyler) happened in 1990, six years before it was reported on in 1996. This is hardly a story about Summitt the coach; rather it is a story implying that for a woman biology is destiny. The fact that *Sports Illustrated* with its already minimal coverage of female sporting achievement chose to focus on Summitt’s pregnancy seems to provide further evidence of Fink and Kensicki’s findings of the tendency to distance the female athlete (or coach in Summitt’s case) from her sport, thereby trivializing her sporting accomplishments and focusing instead on a traditional gender role. Again, an in depth examination of *Sports Illustrated*’s coverage of Summitt could be a possibility for future research.

Fink and Kensicki also report that although *Sports Illustrated* devotes very few pages to female athletes, it devoted ten pages to cover the fact that Jerry Buss, owner of the Lakers, may hand over the team to his daughter, former Playboy model Jeanie Buss. They created an article that included a full-page photograph of a naked Buss with two basketballs covering her breasts along with a smaller picture of her in a low-cut dress holding two basketballs over her breasts with a caption that read, “Pass it on, the Lakers would be in good hands with Jeanie” (331). This is simply another example of the sexualized nature of coverage involving women and sport as well as an example of the fact that the media focuses on women who are not themselves athletes in media that are purportedly covering sports.

In *Sports Illustrated for Women*, Fink and Kensicki found that the articles about female athletes were predominantly sport related but did little to challenge the existing stereotypes of female athletes and female consumers. “*Sports Illustrated for Women* appears to present female athletes in a manner that feminizes the content of their accomplishments (through personal anecdotes, descriptions of their athletic clothing, focus on female athletes’ roles as wives and mothers, etc.) and, subsequently, trivializes their athletic accomplishments” (333). By trivializing their athletic achievements this publication tells its readers that female athletes are heterosexual feminine women first, shoppers second, and, by the way, just happen to play a sport. “Even though the magazine’s marketing theme purports to ‘give voice and vision to the stories of women in sports,’ this vision appears to be a stereotypically feminine one” (333).

The tendency of *Sports Illustrated for Women* to treat female athletes as feminine first and athletes second was evident in the photographic content of the magazine as well as its textual content. Fink and Kensicki found that the majority of photographs of female athletes in the magazine were nonaction shots. The authors report many examples of stereotyped depictions of female athletes—for example the magazine named Venus Williams “Female Athlete of

the Year,” but the picture accompanying the article showed her in a low-cut, skin-tight, revealing dress with a tennis racquet in hand (333). The underlying message in this photograph and throughout the text appears to be that if you are female you can play sports, but make sure you are feminine when you do it. And if you are going to play a sport, the magazine is more likely to give you coverage if you participate in a gender-appropriate individual sport. Unfortunately, *Sports Illustrated for Women* is no longer in publication and therefore the coverage of women in *Sports Illustrated* is potentially even more powerful in influencing how female athletes and coaches are portrayed.

In the most recent study to examine the quality and quantity of media depictions of women in sports, Messner, Duncan and Cooky (2003) extend Messner’s earlier studies of televised sports (also summarized in this literature review) and intriguingly allude to their findings by titling their article “Silence, Sports Bras, and Wrestling Porn: Women in Televised Sports.” They examined televised sports news on three network affiliates and ESPN’s *SportsCenter*; more than 88% of the air time on network affiliates’ sports news shows and close to 97% of *SportsCenter* air time was devoted to men’s sports (48). They found two themes that persisted from their previous studies: “(a) the choice to devote a considerable proportion of the already-thin coverage of women’s sports to humorous feature stories on nonserious women’s sports, and (b) the (often humorous) sexual objectification of athlete women and nonathlete women” (40-1). The authors offer the following example of what the networks choose to cover as women’s sports and assert that “[t]his sort of humorous invitation to engage in sexual voyeurism dovetails thematically with the trivialization of women as athletes” (43):

Both [networks] offered up March 23 feature stories on the wrestler/model Sable. Sable was aiming to promote World Wrestling Federation (WWF) wrestling, but reporters emphasized her scanty, dominatrixstyle attire and the fact

that she had appeared in *Playboy* magazine. KABC's ... 6 p.m. story on Sable was, at 2 minutes and 48 seconds, the longest single news story on women's sports in our 1999 sample. KABC's commentator invited viewers into this story by stating, "We're your source for wrestling porn." He then described Sable as a "sexy villainess," and insulted her in an interview by asking if she could count to 10 (41).

Devoting air time to stories like this under the guise of a women's sports story rather than covering some of the many real athletic events in which women participate sends the very clear message that women are not to be taken seriously in the arena of sport and dilutes the already meager coverage of serious women's athletic events. My data analysis will illuminate that this is also the case with the newspaper coverage of Pat Summitt. These national newspapers often covered Summitt in a task-irrelevant manner, sending the message that Summitt is first and foremost a woman and that traditional gender stereotypes associated with women trump her coaching accomplishments.

Making the case that there are simply more men's sports to cover does not account for the extreme disparity in both the amount and content of coverage. Messner et. al note that when women's NCAA basketball was in season the games received little or no coverage on the news and highlights shows. And when the WNBA was in season those games likewise were almost never mentioned. Also, in July during the immediate aftermath of the U.S. women's highly celebrated World Cup soccer victory, the coverage mainly consisted of "a few humorously sexualized follow-up stories on what came to be known as the 'Brandi Chastain Sports Bra Story'" (which will be addressed in depth later in this review) (48). In sum, Messner et. al assert that sports commentary remains a world dominated by men "who serve up a staple of images and commentary that reinforces the idea that sports are a man's world (indeed, a

heterosexual man's world) and assume that their viewers are predominantly heterosexual men who (a) do not want to see or hear any serious, respectful reporting of women's sports and (b) find pleasure in sexual voyeurism and sexualized jokes about women" (49).

It is no surprise the dominant social norms are reinforced by the media or that indoctrination into proper gender roles begins early. Boys and girls are aware of their sex-appropriate roles as early as age four and some would argue earlier (Nilges 1998). Therefore, it is important to examine sports media targeted to children. Hardin, Walsdorf and Hardin (2002) examined post-1996 Olympic editorial photographs in *Sports Illustrated for Kids* (*SIK*) to determine whether female athletes received more favorable coverage after the 1996 Olympic games in Atlanta than in the magazine's earlier issues and found that the gender inequity gap in *SIK* has widened instead of narrowed—men were found to vastly outnumber women in *SIK* editorial photographs; they were depicted in 76.3% of all editorial units of analysis photos and the photos continued to perpetuate gender stereotypes and sexual difference (349). Men were more often depicted in team sports than in individual sports; men were portrayed in active poses more often than women; men were depicted far more frequently in leadership roles than women; and men dominated depictions of strength sports (352). Of particular relevance to my study is the lack of coverage of women in sports leadership positions because if kids do not see evidence of women as coaches of athletic teams then children may infer that coaching is not an appropriate activity for women.

According to Hardin et. al, *SIK* has a reading audience of 6.7 million children (ages 8-14)—boys representing 71% and girls representing 29%. Consequently *SIK* could reasonably argue that market forces are behind its overwhelming male bias—the smaller number of editorial photographs of women may be a result of marketing the magazine to its readership (355). However, the authors argue that because *SIK* is the only sports magazine for a youth

audience, and because the media play a powerful role in shaping children's beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions, the magazine should be more attentive to the ways in which it may be perpetuating and legitimating gender roles and presenting them to arguably the most easily influenced consumers of media—children. If *SIK* covered more girl and women athletes then perhaps more of their readership would be girls, similar to the effect that Title IX has had on girls' participation in sports. Of course, the magazine is not in the business of educating our youth, it is in the business of making a profit, which makes the author's hope (and mine) somewhat unrealistic. But speaking from my own experience, boy children of successful female athletes can be heard saying that boys are better than girls at sports even when their mothers present a clear challenge to the dominant ideology. This internalizing of gender stereotypes by these children exemplifies the power of the dominant culture and the media's role in influencing children's opinions about what it means to be male and female in our society.

Just as Fink and Kensicki (2002) observed in *Sports Illustrated for Women*, Hardin et. al made note of the importance of photographic representations in *SIK*. They argue that what is depicted in photographic images is particularly important in *SIK* because “photographic images provide the most indelible influences on children; they are more influential than text in shaping messages that children perceive, perhaps at least partially because children develop a sense of visual literacy before they learn written literacy” (346). The images that kids are bombarded with every day influence how they perceive and articulate their proper place in society. Since *SIK* is the only sports magazine at present that is targeted to children, it could profoundly effect those boys and girls already interested in sport by visually and verbally communicating which sports are gender-appropriate for them (or not).

In sum, the studies focused on day-to-day coverage support Gerbner's (1978) notion of symbolic annihilation—female athletes are greatly underrepresented in the media. The result of

this underrepresentation is that the average consumer of the mass media is simply not exposed to the breadth and depth of women's participation and accomplishment in sport. Consequently, the dominant ideological message that sports are the domain of men remains intact. And the message that women are not "real" athletes is maintained, because when the media do cover female "athletes" they are portrayed in a comic or sexy way. Additionally, sports magazines that target men, women and/or children, portray female athletes as heterosexual and feminine first and foremost while minimizing their athletic accomplishments. According to these authors, portrayal of the female athlete seems not to have changed much since 1983 when Boutilier and SanGiovanni reported similar treatment of female athletes by the media.

The following statements represent conclusions I have drawn from my review of the literature on day-to-day coverage of women athletes and athletic events: 1) the dearth of day-to-day coverage of women's sports perpetuates the myth that competitive sport is properly the domain of men; 2) when the media do cover women's competitive sport, the picture of female athletes that emerges is distorted at best and damaging at worst; 3) sports coverage targeted specifically for children provides little incentive for young female athletes to develop as competitive athletes, let alone to see coaching as a viable option; and 4) absent other incentives or a change in consumer expectations, market decisions related to sports coverage can be expected to continue supporting the status quo.

These findings and conclusions have the following implications for my own research. As the top coach in the history of NCAA Division I Basketball, Pat Summitt can and should be a powerful figure in laying to rest notions that women cannot exceed in the male-dominated world of competitive sport. I would hope, but not necessarily expect, this to be the case in the "March Madness" print media coverage examined in my study. Similarly, I would hope that a female with the outstanding record of performance and accolades attained by Summitt would be

presented in those terms by the media. Unfortunately, the print media targeted for examination fell short of providing equitable coverage of Coach Summitt's performance—in either quality or quantity—during the years covered by my study, in spite of the fact that she either won or competed in the NCAA Division I women's championship basketball game in every one of those years.

### Olympic Coverage

Looking at the language of the sportscasters, Daddario (1994), in an article titled “Chilly Scenes of the 1992 Winter Games: The Mass Media and the Marginalization of Female Athletes,” explored the marginalization of women athletes in the host network's (CBS) discourse in the 1992 Winter Olympic Games. Her rhetorical analysis concluded that women athletes were “marginalized through commentators' application of (a) condescending descriptors that trivialized women's achievements, (b) compensatory rhetoric (a term proposed by Farrell, 1989) that blamed women athletes for their failures but made excuses for men athletes, (c) sexual diminishment of women athletes by casting many as adolescents and ‘little girl’ daughters despite their chronological ages, and (d) presentation of women athletes as typically cooperative versus men athletes as typically competitive” (282).

Daddario argues that, “while the mass media help advance women's equality in sport by depicting them in events that realize the extreme possibilities of the human body, such as mogul skiing, luge, and the biathlon, they fail to challenge the sexist ideology that pervades the institution of sport ... [that is] revealed through the hegemonic strategy of marginalization” (276). She points out that during the event the media refrained from revealing the athletes' romantic status in most of their prerecorded personality profiles but instead characterized them as less than grown up. In one example she cited coverage of Olympic speed skater and gold

medalist Bonnie Blair who was continually referred to as “America’s favorite girl next door” and “American’s little sister” (286). This characterization served to diminish her athletic prowess and undermined her stature as an Olympic athlete. As exemplified by Blair, even though female athletes are pursuing and succeeding in masculine-identified sports, “they are still being evaluated and characterized according to a male-defined set of criteria, including the athletes’ physical appearance, emotional well-being, adolescent roles, and familial relationships” (286).

Daddario also found that female athletes are much more likely to be portrayed through their relationships with others than male athletes. The media’s focus on Blair’s relationship with her brother provides such an example. I posit that since Blair had no husband, boyfriend or other significant male that she could be linked to, the media chose to focus on her relationship with the nearest male they could find—her brother—to give viewers a gender-appropriate way in which to view her. Several of my analytical categories were garnered from this particular study and the two that occurred in the coverage of Summitt were the use of condescending descriptors to marginalize her coaching prowess and the “little girl” syndrome whereby Summitt was depicted (generally at some great level of accomplishment, like winning a national championship) as trying to please her Daddy—as if that was her underlying motivation (read explanation) for her well-reputed intensity. Summitt is simply behaving as any good girl would in seeking her father’s approval. Can a woman not be competitive simply because it is in her nature? Intensity for women is apparently legitimate only if it is motivated in some properly gendered way.

Another study focusing on the Olympics by Tuggle and Owen (1999) examined NBC’s coverage of the Centennial Olympics by conducting a descriptive analysis and showed that NBC gave almost as much airtime to women as to men (47% to 53% in the hours from 6:30

p.m. to 11:00 p.m.), which represented only a slight increase for women over 1992.

Interestingly, they point out that if medal success were the only criterion for coverage, U.S. women should have received 70% as much airtime as American men were given (175). This article provides many statistics that serve to concretize the severe differences/disparities that exist in media coverage of men's and women's sports and their relevant findings are articulated below.

Nearly twice as much airtime went to women's individual events as to team events and the disparity was even greater when gymnastics was removed from the team category. "Although a team medal was at stake for part of the competition, gymnastics does not meet the usual definition of a team sport, in which athletes compete simultaneously (such as in basketball or soccer) or in rapid succession (such as in swimming or track relays)" (174). Out of all the coverage devoted to women, 61% dealt with only three sports: swimming, diving, and gymnastics, with gymnastics receiving more than one third (34%) of all coverage devoted to female athletes (174). I would argue that swimming and track should not be considered team sports either, particularly for research comparing coverage of individual and team sports, because there are so many more individual track and field and swimming events than relay events for these sports. And further, much media coverage of these events focuses on how many medals an individual can rack up in them, not how the "team" is doing. For example, in covering the 2004 Summer Olympics, the media continually focused on how many medals might be won by swimmer Michael Phelps, and he was rarely depicted as a member of the "team."

Basketball was the only sport in the study for which a direct comparison could be made between men's and women's coverage because both the men's and women's teams won gold medals. The men's team drew considerably more coverage than did the women (231 minutes to

95 minutes)—the men’s team garnered nearly 2.5 times (242%) as much prime-time coverage as its female counterpart (175). Interestingly, the ratings for the broadcasts of the women’s games were as high as those for the men’s competition. This fact problematizes the assertion (by society and the media) that there is not enough spectator interest in women’s sports. As Title IX implementation has shown, lack of opportunity does not equal lack of interest; and as awareness and opportunity increases, interest increases. Additionally, more opportunity for female athletic participation produces better female athletes.

While women’s teams won gold medals in soccer and softball, the men’s soccer and baseball squads were eliminated from medal contention early in the Games and therefore the researchers could not make a direct comparison. NBC did not even bother to have a venue reporter at the championship game of either women’s softball or soccer, and each of these teams received an average of only 2.5 minutes of coverage per day (180). I suggest that if the men’s soccer and/or baseball teams had won *any* medal, the media coverage would have been much more substantial than either of these women’s teams received. By only providing marginal coverage of these dominant U.S. women’s teams, the general public cannot be expected to be aware of and supportive of these athletes’ tremendous athletic accomplishments.

In an article titled “Pretty Versus Powerful in the Sports Pages,” Jones, Murrell and Jackson (1999) hypothesize that “sport involvement is considered either socially acceptable or unacceptable for females based on how each particular sport conforms to traditional images of appropriate feminine behavior,” and in a content analysis they examine how descriptions of the performance of female athletes reflect dominant societal beliefs about gender (184). This is one of the few studies to examine the print media and its coverage of women’s sports. The authors examined 769 passages of print media describing gold medal winning contests for four U.S. women’s teams in the 1996 Summer Olympics (basketball, gymnastics, soccer, and softball)

and the U.S. women's hockey team in the 1998 Winter Olympics (184). Jones et. al assert that "male-appropriate sports emphasize physical contact through active, aggressive, and autonomous behavior, whereas female-appropriate sports emphasize aesthetics and beauty while discouraging physicality" (184). Following their definition, gymnastics is the only sport in their study considered appropriate for females. The gold medal success of U.S. female athletes in five different team sports provided the authors an excellent opportunity to observe how descriptions of their successful performance reflect dominant beliefs about gender in the larger society (184-5) because they could compare how coverage of female-appropriate sports differs from coverage of sports that are viewed as traditionally gender-inappropriate for women.

Jones et. al examined how beliefs regarding the sex typing of sport are likely to be reflected in the popular media's portrayal of female athletes and "compared print media descriptions of athletes of the same gender, differentiated by the gender appropriateness of the sport in which each athlete participates" (186). They found that descriptions of female athletes' performance reflects widespread beliefs about gender whether the women are competing in a traditional gender appropriate or in a nontraditional gender-inappropriate sport (186). For female athletes playing male-appropriate sports, their results also suggest that, despite the fact that female athletes on Olympic basketball, hockey, and soccer teams have achieved gold-medal performances, "print media coverage frequently deemphasizes task-relevant aspects of their performance and focuses instead on performance-irrelevant dimensions" (188). And in addition, women athletes playing sports defined as female-appropriate received the most female stereotypic comments of all.

In a study of the 1994, 1996, and 1998 Olympics, Eastman and Billings (1999) explored the on-air discourse of the network studio hosts and on-site reporters and found considerable "hype" about women athletes and women's sports countered by favoritism for men athletes and

men's sports, despite clear network policies intended to achieve balanced gender coverage (probably for the commercial purpose of appealing to the broadest possible audience) (145 & 160-1). The authors "compared the amount of coverage of women's and men's events as measured both in clock time and in the number of medal events included, the frequency of mentions of athletes by name, the gender of the most-mentioned athletes, the genderizing of medal sporting events, and the sexual stereotyping of athletes by hosts and reporters" (146). They concluded that NBC network executives were very concerned about the appearance of gender equity in 1996 because their audience research had shown that women accounted for almost half of the viewing population for the Olympics and that this concern had a powerful impact on some aspects of the broadcast. "Because NBC could directly control the mix and length of coverage and the gender balance in on-air promos within prime time, those elements were carefully balanced by gender. In addition, the network boosted the theme of a women's Olympics in its press releases and scripted on-air commentary, much of which was reportedly picked up by other media" (164).

While the network studio hosts generally balanced their comments by gender, Eastman and Billings found that the on-site reporters were the major source of bias toward men's athletics (162). The on-site reporters (who were responsible for much more description of the action) were more likely to focus on the male athletes. In fact, the previous study in this review noted that there was no on-site reporter for several of the women's events in which they won gold medals. Following the pattern of televised sports coverage in general, male athletes and men's sports continued to receive more coverage than women athletes or women's events.

In a study that explored photographic portrayals of female Olympic athletes, Mikosza and Phillips (1999) analyzed the *Golden Girls of Sport* calendar (which was produced to provide Australian women competing in the 1996 Olympic Games with greater media access)

in the context of gender theory, focusing on how gendered bodies are socially constructed and the ways that femininity and masculinity are represented in the mass media (5). Their article provides evidence that America is not the only consumer capitalist country that markets its female Olympic athletes as sexualized objects for the male gaze. Each month of the calendar featured a different Olympic female athlete and contained two photos—a large photo that encompassed the entire page and depicted the athlete in some type of non-athletic pose/scene and a small inset photo that showed the athlete engaged in her sport. The smaller photos had typography overlaying the images informing the viewer about the athlete's accomplishments. The authors argue that in juxtaposing the photos, the calendar "is an example of the fluidity and 'temporality' of socially constituted gender identity" (9). Following Butler (1990), they argue that "gender is not a 'stable identity' but one which is constituted through various repetitions of acts that allow us the belief that we are masculine or feminine," and they assert that "the juxtaposition of active versus passive photographs in the GG calendar discloses a fear of the athletes transgressing their femininity through the engagement in activities within an androcentric arena" (9). In other words, the authors are arguing that these athletes are performing their gender in a highly-feminized way (via the large photos) in an effort to override their athletic performances which do not mesh well with how society expects them to perform their gender.

Mikosza and Phillips selected one athlete and her photographs for a detailed reading to concretize their assertions. The athlete is Hayley Lewis, an internationally successful, recently retired swimmer:

[She] is photographed from the lower thighs up, standing front-on to the camera and dressed in white underwear and red shorts. She wears heavily applied cosmetics with red lipstick on her mouth, which is slightly parted ... Lewis' red

lips draw the viewer's eye to her red shorts, unbuttoned to the crotch area, with her thumbs hooked through the belt holders on the shorts. Along with her stance, front-on to the camera with her legs apart, this gesture appears to suggest a sense of toughness which is not reflected in her "come-on" sexual facial expression (7).

Not surprisingly, they equate this image as well as the other large photos in the calendar with soft porn. They compare Haley's semi-pornographic image with her small "action" photo that "shows signs of physical exertion in her expression, without any of the cultural signifiers of femininity: make-up, long hair and breasts. The crucial point is the dichotomy between the perceived feminine and non-feminine, as the dominant positioning of one image to another disrupts the possibilities of an active, powerful notion of femininity" (8).

The producer of the calendar (a woman) is quoted as saying that her intention in creating the calendar was to "convince girls that taking part in athletics didn't mean becoming 'all masculine looking' and they argue that her justification of the calendar "cuts to the core of the gendered nature of sport" (10). The message is that these women are primarily sexual objects for the male gaze. The producer of this calendar seems to be responding to the underlying fear explained by Boutilier & SanGiovanni's (1983) that all female athletes are most likely lesbians. This and other studies in this review suggest that it is more acceptable for female athletes to be identified with porn stars than risk the fear that they might be identified with lesbians.

In a similar vein, Knight and Giuliano (2001) argue that sport commentators and writers "often allude or explicitly refer to a female athlete's attractiveness, emotionality, femininity, and heterosexuality (all of which effectively convey to the audience that her stereotypical gender role is more salient than her athletic role) ... [while] the narratives of male athletes are free to focus on their athletic accomplishments" (217 & 219). In their quantitative study examining

what the effect this type of coverage has on people's perceptions of athletes, participants were required to read a fictitious newspaper profile of an Olympic athlete where the article focused on the athlete's attractiveness (as coverage of female athletes often does) or on the athlete's athleticism (as coverage of male athletes often does). In one set of the articles the athlete was male, while in the second set the athlete was female. The authors found that participants did not have favorable impressions of nor liked articles about female and male athletes when their attractiveness was the main focus of the article (217). Also, although the same picture was used in each of the male and each of the female articles, the female athlete whose attractiveness was the main focus of an article was perceived to be more physically attractive than was the female athlete whose athletic accomplishments were the focus of an article. The same pattern was not found with male athletes (223-224). This result seems to provide evidence that readers attend to information about a female athlete's looks and perhaps see that information as more appropriate when included in stories about female athletes than they do in stories about male athletes.

Though the researchers note that whether the media "merely reflects or actively refracts" public opinion is still debatable, they argue, however idealistically, that "the media need to be cognizant of (a) the damage that focusing on athletes' attractiveness can have on people's perceptions, (b) the fact that people might prefer articles that focus on an athlete's athleticism more than ones that focus on attractiveness, and (c) the reality that they do not merely reflect public opinion; they, in fact, can actively shape it" (224-5). The effects of the media's trivializing and marginalizing coverage can and does influence society's perceptions and has particular power over society's perceptions of female athletes.

In another study also by Knight and Giuliano, they assert that the notion still persists that all female athletes are lesbians and consequently the sports media employs a "feminine

apologetic” whereby they “heterosexualize female athletes by emphasizing their relationship with men” (272). They assert that because being a successful athlete contradicts a woman’s prescribed societal gender role, “female athletes are required to overcompensate for their masculine behavior on the field by acting in traditionally feminine ways off the field” (273). Additionally, since it assumed that male athletes are heterosexual (because they are participating in a gender appropriate activity) this pattern is not found in coverage of male athletes. In a quantitative effort to determine how media portrayals affect people’s perceptions of male and female athletes, the authors created fictitious newspaper articles (one depicting a clearly heterosexual male and one depicting a clearly heterosexual female Olympic athlete) and then adjusted the articles to portray each athlete as having an ambiguous sexual orientation. They report and discuss their results are in a 2003 article titled “Blood, Sweat, and Jeers: The Impact of the Media’s Heterosexist Portrayals on Perceptions of Male and Female Athletes.”

Because the gender-appropriateness of an athlete’s sport has been shown to be important in influencing perceptions of that athlete, Knight and Giuliano chose a sport that was not perceived as especially masculine or feminine—distance running. No pictures of the athletes were included, as prior research has shown that the attractiveness, masculinity, and femininity of faces can influence attributions of sexual orientation (275-6). Knight and Giuliano found that both male and female athletes who were described as clearly heterosexual in the articles were perceived much more favorably than were athletes with an ambiguous sexual orientation by both the male and female participants. Interestingly, and contrary to previous research, male athletes did not receive an “assumption” of heterosexuality. The authors posit that a male athlete also might be perceived as homosexual “if his sport is not strongly gender-schematic (e.g., compared to football or hockey) enough to ‘assure’ the audience of his heterosexuality” (280).

Although bias seemed to be found against athletes with an ambiguous sexual orientation in this study, the authors assert with increased media coverage and exposure to homosexual athletes, the public may begin to develop more understanding and acceptance of homosexuality in sport. (Of course their study was done before the issue of gay marriage was put so directly on the public's agenda via the Massachusetts court ruling and various constitutional amendments that appeared on many ballots across the country in the November 2004 election.)

Of particular interest in the Knight and Giuliano (2001) study is the fact that the authors created relationship-grounded stories for both female *and* male athletes. Most of the participants in this particular study questioned why the stories they read focused so much on the particular athlete's relationship, leading me to posit that they noticed the relationship focus precisely because male athletes are rarely covered in terms of their relationships. As the research in this review shows, women athletes are much more likely to be covered by the media in ways that focus on their relationships to others while men are rarely depicted in this way (except when they are dating celebrities). It would be interesting to know if the participants in the Knight and Giuliano study would have objected to the content of the stories as much if all of the athletes described were female. No one seems to object to hearing about Summitt's husband, son, father, or her "relationships" with her male coaching peers. Where are the mentions of her relationships with her mother or her female coaching peers?

To sum up this section, studies done on media coverage of Olympic female athletes find that the athletic performances of women are marginalized by commentators who trivialize women's achievements through the use of condescending descriptors, blame women athletes for their failures (while they make excuses for men athletes), and present female athletes through their stereotypic sex roles as either "little girl" daughters, sisters, mothers or wives. Studies done on media coverage of Olympic female athletes find that the coverage focuses more on

female athletes who are engaged in three “gender-appropriate” sports—gymnastics, swimming and diving. When the media did cover “gender-inappropriate” sports, the coverage highlighted issues other than the athletic accomplishments of the female athletes, focusing instead on their attractiveness, femininity and heterosexuality or on their relationship to others. Finally, if female athletes were consciously marketed, they were overtly heterosexualized as objects for the male gaze.

I come away from the review of the literature on media coverage of the Olympics with the following conclusions: 1) even at the ultimate level of amateur athletic competition—the Olympics—women’s athletic performance takes a back seat to their physical feminine attributes and gender-appropriate behavior; 2) the intense and favorable coverage centering upon gender-appropriate sports reinforces the notion that only certain sports are proper for female athletes to pursue; 3) language continues to be used in ways that denigrate women in the world of competitive sport; 4) irrelevant and off-the-field behavior tends to be the focus in coverage of women competing in gender-inappropriate sports; and 5) winning is less a determining factor in the type and quantity of media exposure than gender, especially in sports perceived as gender-inappropriate (such as basketball).

Each of these conclusions is relevant to my own research into the portrayal of Coach Summitt in the newspaper coverage included in my study. I have used some of the findings in this portion of my literature review to create analytical categories in which to code statements found in the *New York Times*, *The Washington Post* and *USA Today* to determine if she is portrayed in the same way as the female athletes. Some of the most interesting findings illuminated in my data analysis are grounded in the work of Jones, Murrell and Jackson (1999) on gender-inappropriate sport and the work of Knight and Giulano’s (2001) on the perception of a lesbian presence in sport. Summitt is in a gender-inappropriate job coaching a gender-

inappropriate sport for women, and this fact appears to affect the coverage that she receives. And, because Summitt is associated with a gender-inappropriate sport, she and the media seem to respond to a societal fear of the lesbian presence. I argue that the reason the media focus so much on Summitt's relationship with male others is because, by focusing on such relationships, the media can assure their readership of Summitt's heterosexuality. It is an important strategy in the preservation of hegemonic masculinity that she be properly gendered (heterosexual).

### Women's National Soccer Team Coverage

Cohen (2001) asserts that sport is used to sell newspapers and magazines, to attract corporate sponsors and to boost television ratings, while sports coverage serves to create interest and demand for sport, promote athletes and develop heroes and heroines. She argues that sport and the media function together as "conservators of convention" to reinforce traditional norms and values rather than challenging the status quo (232-3). For Cohen, "[n]o single issue has posed greater concern to the sanctity of the male sports establishment than the presence of lesbians and gay men in sport. ...Homophobia has served to control the female presence in sport by forcing all women, gay or straight, to create images that conform to traditional notions of femininity regardless of their sexual orientation" (237). She also argues that the media has "deflected notions of a lesbian presence" through careful construction and representation of athletes' identities in ways that conform to traditional values regarding femininity and sexuality (238).

Cohen uses the 1999 Women's World Cup Soccer Championship Team to examine the media's treatment/coverage of the female athlete. She characterizes the team as "a group of young women who have actively promoted themselves in the sexualization game. They appeared to be on a crusade to blend athleticism with sexualization by framing it as 'pride in

their physiques” (240). She asserts that these women publicly proclaimed pride in their musculature while hiding behind acceptable norms. Rather than repeat examples from other studies, I will explore this assertion further in the Shugart (2003) study that follows this one.

Cohen addresses one issue concerning the women’s soccer team that was ignored by the media—disparities in salary between the U.S. women and their male counterparts. Following their World Cup victory, the United States Soccer Federation (USSF) wanted the women to continue to compete in year 2000 under their expired contract but the women requested a salary raise that would equal that of the American men’s team (who had finished dead last in a field of 32 teams when they last competed in the World Cup competition in 1998). The men had received a \$20,000 roster bonus for making the team while the women received \$2,500. The men received \$35,000 for finishing the competition while the women received \$12,500 for winning the World Cup (251). Cohen questions why there was no media coverage of this inequity and asserts that “the media’s refusal to acknowledge a struggle that challenges the status quo in effect condones the hegemonic system” (251). Perhaps Chastain and her teammates were forced to “show their stuff” to pay the bills.

Shugart (2003) also studied the media coverage of the US National Women’s Soccer Team and its members throughout the 1999 Women’s World Cup in order to assess how gender was addressed in that coverage and to explore in depth the construction of female sexuality in the mediated representation of this team and its members. She argues that “traditional constructs of gender are reified in that coverage, and the primary if not exclusive means by which that is accomplished is sexualization of the athletes” (4).

As Shugart notes, the team and its members were the subject of considerable media attention, although primarily in the entertainment media and generally not in the context of their athletic prowess:

Much of this occurred prior to coverage of the women in their athletic capacity, including Hamm's selection as one of *People Weekly's* 50 Most Beautiful People; Foudy's appearance in a swimsuit in the pages of *Sports Illustrated*; and Chastain's nude posing for *Gear* magazine. The Late Show with David Letterman, too, contributed to this perception in a variety of ways, for instance by Letterman regularly showing a picture of the team, in which the players are standing shoulder to shoulder like beauty contestants and appear to be wearing nothing more than "Late Show" T-shirts . . . . The verbal and visual positioning of the women as passive objects for the male gaze persisted in the coverage of the World Cup tournament, as well (8).

As with the female Olympic athletes in "gender-inappropriate" sports, the majority of the media attention given the U.S. Women's National Soccer Team focused on sexualizing and objectifying them rather than focusing on their athletic ability. Although their World Cup Championship game turned out to be the most-watched soccer game in U.S. television history, the question arises whether the massive viewership resulted from the love of soccer, nationalist pride in the team or voyeurism based the media's penchant for focusing on the sex appeal of certain members of the team?

According to Shugart, the most blatant way in which sexualized performance characterized coverage of the women's soccer team was the "controversy" over Chastain's removal of her shirt upon scoring the winning goal of the tournament, which made her, according to *Sports Illustrated*, 'the most talked-about athlete on Earth' (Crothers 2000, cited in Shugart, 12). Indeed, that image arguably defined the team, then and now. She cites numerous ways in which this "controversy" was described by the media, but my personal favorite is her example from the *Atlanta Constitution*. "[I]mmediately after she booted home the winning

shootout goal ...Chastain ripped offer her jersey and practically announced to a rapt nation, 'I've got your World Cups right here!'" (Hummer 1999, cited in Shugart 13).

Shugart points out another example of the the team's blatantly sexualized media coverage—the popular description of the team as “booters with hooters.” Although the phrase was attributed originally to team co-captain Foudy, “the media embraced it unreservedly, all the while virtuously asserting that they were simply quoting Foudy” (13-14). Shugart argues that “[t]he ‘booters with hooters’ reference, in fact, represented a specific manifestation of the sexualization of performance strategy: the dichotomous juxtaposition of two disparate images, one athletic and one sexual, implicitly or explicitly, that guarantees the conflation of female athleticism with sexual performance” (14).

An important question is why Foudy would chose to label herself along with her teammates in this way. I argue that one explanation is that it is her attempt to assert that she and her teammates are normal, heterosexual women even though they are engaged in a gender-inappropriate sport. And no one made Chastain remove her shirt to reveal her sports bra. These women seem to be willing participants in their heterosexualized portrayals.

Shugart also brings up the fact that coverage of two of the team's members—goalkeeper Briana Scurry and midfielder Michelle Akers—was notably different and therefore highly conspicuous: “neither of these athletes was featured as passively sexual, nor was their performance sexualized in mediated coverage” (21). As she rightly notes, it was Briana Scurry—the only African American on the team—who actually won the game for the Americans by blocking China's last penalty kick. Interestingly, she did not receive the credit nor remotely the publicity that Chastain did. And when she did get coverage, her race was nearly always mentioned. Shugart argues that “Scurry's notable exclusion dramatized it and endowed it with particularly racialized meanings” (22).

As Shugart argues, “[t]his same dynamic was evident in coverage of Michelle Akers, although age and not race was the defining feature in her case” (23). She asserts that Akers was also the most masculine (as traditionally defined) of the players; “she was notoriously aggressive, described across the print media as ‘gutsy,’ ‘brave,’ ‘a lioness,’ ‘dominant,’ ‘relentless,’ ‘reckless,’ ‘driven by vengeance,’ and possessed of ‘unsurpassed strength’” (23). She was also the oldest starting member of the team, a fact that was noted in every instance of her coverage, although interestingly she was only a year older than several members of the team and only two years older than Chastain (24). The fact that she suffered from Chronic Fatigue Syndrome was oft reported as well as her many knee surgeries. For Shugart,

At the very least, irrespective of imagined sexual orientation, her aggressiveness suggested that she would not be receptive to male control and its sexual connotations. However, by simultaneously casting Akers as decrepit, that potentially threatening, unfettered sexuality was negated ... Although Akers was, in fact, quite young and only slightly older than her sexualized teammates, focusing on her injuries and illness cultivated an image of her as much older than she was and thus sexually nonviable, effectively neutralizing any challenge that she might have posed to established media practices pertaining to the sexualization of female athletes (25).

Interestingly, I found that Summitt’s age was a matter of import to the media. The media was quoting Geno Auriemma (the UConn women’s coach and Summitt’s “rival”) who likened Summitt to a cheesesteak “joint” in Philadelphia called Pat’s that he described as “old and dilapidated,” implying that Summitt was old and dilapidated as well. In fact Summitt was 50 years old at the time of Auriemma’s comparison and Auriemma is only two years her junior.

Returning to the women's soccer team, both Scurry and Akers were quoted in the media as disapproving of their teammates sexualized posings for the various media, arguing that such antics were not helping to further women athletes; their objections largely fell on deaf ears. It seems that purveyors of the dominant ideology prefer their female athletes to be portrayed in a heterosexy manner so that they do not threaten traditional gender norms and that many female athletes themselves are happy to be portrayed in this way. I think that one reason that the U.S. Women's soccer team garnered so much media attention is precisely because the majority of its players were eager to participate in sexualized coverage and the team provided a great opportunity for the media to present women playing a tough sport in a non-threatening and normal way.

In summary, both studies of women's soccer World Cup coverage in this review expose (quite literally) a media bias toward female athletes who can be portrayed as feminine, heterosexual/heterosexy objects who just happen to be athletes. Both studies also expose a media more comfortable covering female athletes playing gender-inappropriate sports if the players at least look "normal" (read heterosexual and white) and if the players reflect traditional notions of what it means to be female. One of the studies also addresses the disparity between men and women athletes in bonuses and questions why the media remained silent on such a substantive issue.

I draw two conclusions from these two definitive studies. First, the media seem to engage in a "don't ask, don't tell" policy, at least in coverage of Women's World Cup Soccer. That is, team members who, in appearance and behavior, do not conform to the stereotypical picture of femininity are likely to receive significantly less coverage than appropriately sexy team members receive, and the coverage these marginalized players do receive likely focuses on irrelevancies like age or race. Second, in any sport perceived as gender-inappropriate the

media will apparently go to great lengths to assure its audience that female athletes are still women first and athletes only secondarily and will gravitate toward players likely to make the case for them.

In my own research, I would hope in covering a professional of my subject's caliber, the media would not feel compelled to hold to the pattern demonstrated in these studies. However, my suspicions were that a substantial portion of the coverage of Summitt during "March Madness" would be devoted to validating her as a heterosexual woman and emphasizing her more acceptable and properly gendered roles of wife, mother and daughter over her role as coach. As it turned out, my suspicions proved more accurate than my hopes. However, there were some surprises related to type and source of the newspaper comments that focused on both Summitt's "appropriate" gender-related roles and her heterosexual/heterosexy objectification. Also, coverage conforming to the type suggested by the women's World Cup studies turned out to be less substantial than I had suspected.

### Women's Basketball Coverage

Arguing that "television plays a significant role through its reproduction of images and messages that legitimate the dominant ideology of a society," Blinde, Greendorfer & Shanker (1991) examined 16 telecasts (6 men's games and 10 women's games) played during the 1988-89 and 1989-90 seasons in order to identify possible differences in media coverage of men's and women's intercollegiate basketball in order to explore the extent to which mass media coverage reflects the broader gender ideology of society (99 & 101). While they did not find the more blatant forms of sexist practices identified in previous studies, their data suggest that "commentary differences are often so subtle in form and content that they often go unnoticed and are rarely challenged or questioned [and that] the underpinnings of these subtle

differences in coverage lie in the underlying ideology that historically links sport with masculinity and males” (109).

One of their major findings was the use of non-parallel terms in describing male and female athletes—for example “men” vs. “girls,” or “men” vs. “ladies”—a finding still present in more recent studies (106). Of particular interest (because it has not been addressed in other studies) was their observation that the commentators suggested that the mental aspects of the game of basketball might be difficult for some female athletes. They cite an example, following a 3-second call made on a player when the commentator stated, “Not only do you have to pass the ball but you have to think about what you are going to do, and the player can be distracted by that” (108). I did find the existence of non-parallel terms in my examination of Summitt’s coverage which I will describe later in the data analysis portion of this paper. Summitt’s intellect was not directly addressed in any of the articles but her ability to coach was described as “brilliant” by exactly *one* reporter. Another reporter referring to a different game called her coaching tactics “masterful.” For the most part though, Summitt’s coaching accomplishments were described in a more factual manner without the use of descriptive adjectives. Descriptors seemed to be reserved for her personality rather than her coaching achievements, and this too will be in the data analysis section. In sum, Blinde et. al argue that,

despite the ‘new’ image (or social construction) of an active, physical woman who participates in sport, the old message is still retained through selective interpretation and production of women’s athletic events ... [U]nderlying meanings remain the same: (a) males continue to represent the accepted standard of performance or norm, while the women’s game represents a derivative (and inferior) form of the men’s game; (b) instead of recognizing the image of active, physical woman within its own right, it is simply one of not measuring up to that

of men; and (c) presentation of visual and verbal cues reinforce existing gender stereotypes that are so deeply embedded in our belief system that they underlie and to some degree dictate media practice (albeit in insidious and unconscious fashion) (110-111).

These underlying messages serve to trivialize and marginalize female athletes and subordinate their accomplishments to those of male athletes, reinforcing the dominant ideology that men are “naturally” superior to women.

Messner, Duncan and Jensen (1993) examined gender stereotyping in televised sports to compare how live, play-by-play television sports commentators talk about women’s sports and women athletes with how they talk about men’s sports and men athletes (220). Focusing on basketball and tennis coverage, they noted an “infantilization” of women athletes in the television broadcasts—women were referred to as “girls” and “young ladies,” whereas men were referred to as “men,” “young men” and “young fellas” consistent with the previous study by Blinde et. al. Women athletes were also far more likely to be called by their first names, whereas in the basketball broadcasts, the only men referred to by first name were African-American. They argue that their findings “are consistent with ‘the theory of gender stratification’ developed by Connell (1987) and applied to sport by Messner (1989), Messner & Sabo (1990) and Kidd (1987), that “sports media reinforce the overall tendency of sport to be an institution which simultaneously 1) constructs and legitimizes men’s overall power and privilege over women; and 2) constructs and legitimizes heterosexual, white, middle class men’s power and privilege over subordinated and marginalized groups of men” (229).

In basketball, they found that verbal attributions of strength to women were often stated in ambivalent language which “undermined or neutralized” the words conveying power and strength: “big girl,” “she’s tiny, she’s small, but so effective under the boards,” “her little jump

hook,” etc. (226). A difference in descriptions of basketball coaches was also noted. Joe Ciampi (male) “yells” at his team, while Pat Summit (female) was described twice as “screaming” off the bench. Men coaches were not described as “screaming,” a term which, as the authors note, often implies lack of control, powerlessness, even hysteria (227). My study also found that Summit was portrayed as a screamer rather than a yeller and also that “ambivalent language” was used in strange and interesting ways in some of the articles that I examined.

Women were also more likely to be framed as failures due to some personal shortcoming whereas men were framed as failing due to the strength of their opponents—“[t]his framing of failure suggests that it is the thoughts and actions of the male victor that wins games, rather than suggesting that the loser’s lack of intelligence or ability is responsible for losing games ... Men were framed as active agents in control of their destinies, women as reactive objects” (227-228). In short, their findings suggest that the language used by commentators tends to subtly reinforce gender and racial stereotypes/hierarchies.

While I did look for evidence of Summitt being framed as a failure as described by Messner et al., I did not find any examples of such. However, it is important to note that the time frame for each of the years in my analysis was the NCAA championship tournament time. And in the time frame delineated for the six years encompassing this examination Summitt lost only three games. It would be an interesting feat to frame one as a failure in this scenario. On a couple of occasions however, Summitt did blame herself for her team’s failure to meet seasonal expectations.

In a study that replicated their 1994 study involving the 1989 basketball championships, Messner, Duncan & Wachs (1996) analyzed television coverage of the 1993 NCAA women’s and men’s basketball Final Four. They examined “the ways in which ‘audience preference’ is socially constructed for men’s sports over women’s sports” and concluded that the men’s Final

Four was constructed by the sports and media complex to be a “must see,” whereas the women’s Final Four was constructed largely as a “nonevent” (422). Their research revealed that a total of 22 minutes was devoted to the women’s event, compared with 254 minutes to the men’s event; there were a total of 10 stories on the women’s tournament and 41 stories on the men’s. Visuals accompanied 39 of the men’s stories (usually taped action shots) but only six of the women’s. The men’s stories averaged 2 minutes, 16 seconds, while the women’s stories averaged 36 seconds each. Additionally, news stories on women athletes were far less likely than those on men athletes to be accompanied by interviews with athletes or coaches (13 of the 41 men’s basketball stories were accompanied by interviews, while only one of the ten women’s stories was) (426).

Further, the pregame shows for each championship game were strikingly different. While the introduction to the women’s championship game consisted entirely of a 1-minute, 30-second montage of highlight footage from earlier games, the men’s pregame show actually had a named theme, “Prelude to a Championship,” and was a dramatic 40-minute presentation (430). Likewise, the half-time shows of the women’s games constantly cut back and forth between discussion and analysis of the women’s game and discussion and pregame hype of the upcoming men’s games, allotting about two-thirds of their time to a discussion of the men’s game, players and teams. Not surprisingly, the men’s half-time shows did not mention the women’s event other than to say it was taking place (430).

I have pulled the following substantial quote directly from the Messner et. al because it is a powerful statement concerning the state of women’s sports and its treatment in the media today:

Our research suggests that sports programmers intertwine these viewing pleasures with dominant ideologies of hegemonic masculinity (heterosexuality,

physical power, violence, winning at all costs, etc.). We suspect that this is a key to understanding the current state of play of mediated men's and women's sports in the construction and possible contestation of gendered power relations.

Second, our observations suggest that not only has television failed, thus far, to build audiences for women's basketball; it has actively undermined the possibility of the development of such an audience. The sports media complex gives audiences no reason to be interested in, much less excited about, tuning in to view a women's Final Four tournament that may seem to descend into their living rooms from virtually nowhere (437).

Simply put, Messner et. al argue that because the Women's Final Four Championship is not framed as a "must see" event, the achievements of the athletes and coaches who participate in the event are trivialized. Because the media has the power to frame *any* event as a "must see" (or not), they profoundly influence the public's opinion of whether or not an event is worth watching or culturally important. Why is the Superbowl marketed as a World Championship when it is not an international competition? By minimizing the "importance" of women's athletic events while aggrandizing the import of men's events, the media support the dominant ideology of sport—that men's power and dominance on the playing field both mirror and legitimate men's "natural" superiority over women.

My direct observation of the coverage of the women's NCAA tournament is that in recent years it has been marketed in a more professional manner, with more sophisticated graphics and editing techniques and in effect does a much better job of promoting the Women's Final Four (if not the tournament itself) as a "must see" event. However, it is still the case that much of the halftime coverage of these games as well as regular season games is devoted to covering men's college basketball. It is still an anomaly to receive any sort of women's

basketball coverage during the halftime of a men's game.

What I find so interesting in coverage of the Women's Final Four in recent years (specifically the last three years of my study) is that the event itself is marketed as a "much see" event but it is a "must see" event because it has been framed by the media as a "contestation of gendered power relations" to use Messner et al.'s words. This contest of gendered power relations is specifically between Pat Summitt (the female coach of the University of Tennessee) and Geno Auriemma (the male coach of the University of Connecticut). Forget that the two teams competing for the championship are comprised of women; it still is framed as a battle of the sexes. In the last three years of my study, these two teams played one another for the national championship, and the University of Connecticut (and Auriemma) won all three. (In the earlier three years of my study, the University of Tennessee won the national championship although UConn was not Tennessee's only opponent. UConn made it to the Final Four in only one of those years, only to be defeated by Tennessee.) The way the media present it, one would think that this relatively young, relatively new male coach is the conqueror-apparent of Summitt and her "evil empire" (Auriemma's description of Summitt's team). In fact, Auriemma is only two years younger than Summitt and has been coaching at UConn for 19 years. Prior to his tenure at UConn he had been coaching basketball in some capacity for 10 years. So, the reality is that Summitt has been coaching for 31 years and Auriemma for 29. Seen in this light Auriemma is hardly some new coaching phenom. Yes, he has accomplished greatness during his tenure with UConn, but his career statistics do not put him on par with Summitt. In fact he does not make the top ten of Division I Women's Basketball Winningest Coaches (of which the top six are women) ([www.wnpr.or/TVUConnWBAuriemma.asp](http://www.wnpr.or/TVUConnWBAuriemma.asp), [www.hoophall.com/history](http://www.hoophall.com/history)).

But it is Auriemma's and Summitt's media-created "rivalry" that we hear about in the national media. We do not hear about Summitt's "rivalry" with others against whom she

fiercely competes—the majority of whom are female. Is the purpose of the Summitt/Auriemma “rivalry” simply an effort to sell more newspapers, generate a greater audience, or is it a hegemonic strategy to assert male superiority and dominance? Is it intentional? I don’t think the purpose, motivation or intent matters as much as the potential effects. The effects arguably reify traditional gender stereotypes, reify difference and serve to preserve the status quo regarding gender hierarchy and gender difference. In such an environment gender-inappropriate behavior is deviant at best and harmful to the moral fiber at worst (i.e. a pervasive lesbian presence preying on unsuspecting females). What about the alarming rate of male coaches preying on the girls and women they coach as reported by the Women’s College Basketball Coaches Association? The national media is not particularly interested in covering that aspect of sport. The issues I bring up here are certainly beyond the scope of my study. I simply bring them up in order to create awareness of other “realities” that can have a huge effect on girls and women athletes, much more so than the sex or sexuality of a given coach.

My review of the literature related to coverage of women’s basketball leads me to the two major conclusions in the following statements. First, language is used in subtle and socially acceptable ways to support and maintain an ideology of the “natural” superiority of male over female. This is accomplished by using words that place women in a subordinate role (“men” vs. “girls”), characterizing the reactions of women in words that imply stereotypically female hysteria (Summitt “screams” while her male rival “yells”), and by using descriptions that call into question the mental capacity for women to “think” about what they are doing. Second, media coverage aggrandizes men’s events and trivializes women’s events. The men’s NCAA Division I championship game has long been characterized as a “must see” event while the women’s game has been seen and treated as a “non event.” More recently the women’s championship game is being touted as “must see” but perhaps only because it can now be

characterized as a “battle of the sexes,” as will be discussed later. It is still true that the time devoted to publicizing and covering the men’s game is ten times that devoted to the women’s game— especially in build up and pregame coverage, effectively undermining any “must see” lip service paid to the women’s game.

Overall, my review of the literature shows that while female athletics and athletes threaten to undermine the traditional association of sport with manhood, media coverage has worked to reinforce traditional stereotypes of both masculinity and femininity and maintain the status quo. Here are the major points that I would like to reiterate. Concerning day-to-day coverage of the female athlete, the major finding is that she is hard to find. Simply put, the general public is not aware of regularly occurring women’s athletic events or of the accomplishments of female athletes. Every four years, however, the public is reminded that female athletes do exist via Olympic coverage. While the media do cover female Olympic athletes, they are underrepresented and the media generally focus on those women who participate in gender-appropriate sports like gymnastics and swimming rather than on team sports or those sports that are viewed as traditionally masculine. In all of the coverage, as Hargreaves and others have noted, female athletes are depicted as heterosexualized women first and athletes second. Their athletic accomplishments are trivialized and marginalized in many ways including portraying them as heterosexually feminine, childlike or sexualized in a softly pornographic way. The studies dealing with the U.S. Women’s National Soccer team provide vivid examples of the ways in which the media sexualize and objectify female athletes while also demonstrating that women athletes themselves sometimes willingly participate in their own sexualization and, therefore, marginalization.

I did not expect to find Pat Summitt portrayed in a sexualized manner because I thought her age and stature would make such depictions unlikely. But it did occur in specific ways that I

will address in my data analysis. Additionally, in her 31-year tenure as coach of the University of Tennessee, the media have spent a considerable amount of time convincing the public of her heterosexuality. When she *finally* married (15 years into her coaching career), the media clamored to interview her husband every chance they got during the first year of their marriage. They questioned Mr. Summitt about “Pat’s” coaching strategies, how she was feeling, what she was thinking—questions I think would be more appropriate to ask the actual coach. I am not sure his job as an investment banker provided him with the insight he needed to address Summitt’s game plans, strategies, etc. In my estimation, one reason the media focused on Summitt’s husband so much (until her son was born about a few years later) was because her marriage provided the media an opportunity to position Summitt as traditionally feminine, a portrayal that had eluded them for 15 years. The media seem less intent these days in assuring the public of her heterosexuality probably because they can identify her as a wife and mother and also because she is probably old enough now that issues of her sexuality no longer seem important. However it was interesting to discover that the media still has a tendency to portray Summitt, after 31 years as a head coach, through her relationship with others—primarily male others. I argue that these portrayals serve to further heterosexualize her and as a result, marginalize and trivialize her professional accomplishments.

## METHOD

Because sport carries deep and extremely influential cultural meaning, the increased presence of women in sport carries with it profound challenges to cultural norms. Since the sexes are in a clear binary relationship in the world of sport, it is very easy to develop an “us” versus “them” mentality. Since the relationship between men and women is also a hierarchical one where men are viewed as physically superior to women, this view translates male physical

superiority into overall male superiority (and dominance). This study explores the ways in which this assumption of male superiority might influence the ways in which a successful female coach is represented by the media by utilizing analytical categories derived from the literature review and described in what follows.

The general issue that I examined is how print media coverage of a successful female coach may be influenced by gender stereotypes. I explored how the media construct, represent, articulate and create Summitt's identity in an effort to explore the possible gendered nature of her coverage. I found that the print coverage of Summitt was framed in a gendered sex role stereotypical way, and that Summitt's accomplishments were trivialized and marginalized in many of the same ways that the accomplishments of female athletes were trivialized and marginalized. Following Butler (1990), I wanted to explore how the media frames gendered performances in ways that highlight male and female differences. Additionally, I argue that Summitt herself might feel societal pressure to consciously perform her gender in a hegemonically heterosexual feminine way.

The overarching message in previous studies on portrayals of female athletes by the media suggest that there are many ways that the media communicate to its audience that a woman's gender role is more salient than her athletic role. Consequently, the media serve to reinforce the status quo in terms of gender privilege and hierarchy in our society. One of the more blatant ways by which this is accomplished is through the media's use of female-stereotypic language in representing female athletes. As Knight and Giuliano (2002) discovered, these texts often refer to a female athlete's looks, emotionality, femininity and heterosexuality; and they focus more on these aspects rather than on the athletic accomplishments of female athletes. I will be looking for this same female-stereotypic language in my analysis.

Rhetorical analysis is the foundation for my qualitative examination of the

print coverage. For Foss et. al., “rhetoric is the human use of symbols to communicate” (1). They assert that humans construct the world in which they live through their symbolic choices and that “[e]very word choice we make—every perspective we choose to apply—results in seeing the world one way rather than another” (2). They further assert that words are symbols that stand for objects to which there is no literal connection. Simply put, symbols are arbitrary. These concepts are important in examining texts from a rhetorical perspective. I examined how the language used to describe Pat Summitt may reinforce the dominant ideology in our society that privileges males and their accomplishments over females and their accomplishments. As such, my study can be viewed as feminist rhetorical criticism whereby I question the privileging of one gender over another in sport (as well as in society in general). When I use the term “feminist,” I ascribe to the definition that bell hooks has for the term: “to be ‘feminist’ in any authentic sense of the term is to want for all people, female and male, liberation from sexist role patterns, domination and oppression” (24). Consequently I will be looking for the ways in which the the texts in my study may perpetuate (or challenge) traditional gender stereotypes, legitimate the “natural” superiority of men over women and oppress females athletes and all women by perpetuating notions of what it means to be “properly” female.

Finally, my analysis is informed by the work of Judith Butler and her notion of gender as performance. My concern is to point out ways in which sexual differences are socially constructed because biological explanations are still used to legitimate the different treatment of males and females, especially in relation to sport. As Butler (1990) observes, however, “the body is not a ‘being’, but a variable boundary, a surface whose permeability is politically regulated, a signifying practice within a cultural field of gender hierarchy” (139). Our bodies are inscribed with meanings, but these meanings are constantly shifting and fluid. Butler argues that the performance of gender is assigned through a repetition of acts that constitute us as

masculine and feminine, and I will explore the ways in which the media depict the acts of Summitt in ways that may affirm her “appropriate” gendered performance.

Choosing the aforementioned time frame known as “March Madness,” I searched for all articles containing Pat Summitt’s name in the *New York Times*, *USA Today* and *The Washington Post* in 1996, 1997, 1998, 2000, 2003 and 2004. I chose these particular years because Summitt’s team, the University of Tennessee Lady Vols, was in the championship game each of these years—winning three (1996, 1997, 1998) and losing three (2000, 2003, 2004).

In these articles, there are three basic ways her name appears: 1) Summitt’s name is mentioned in a direct quote from someone other than the writer; 2) the writer uses her name in the text; or 3) the writer has included a quote from Summitt herself (i.e. “We played great,” said Summitt). I marked every sentence in each of the articles where Summitt’s name was used, or where she was being referenced (i.e. by a pronoun), or where she was speaking. I placed statements that Summitt herself made where she talked about specific basketball players not directly involved in games that her team had played, would play or might play into the “other” analytical category. So, unless the players were her own or in one of the above categories, I placed them in the “other” analytical category. An example of this type of statement is when Summitt was asked to comment on a player’s talent, ability, etc. when the player was not somehow involved in Summitt’s world. In some cases, these were high school players, both male and female. I conducted qualitative analyses of the aforementioned print sources’ coverage of these six tournaments. To provide a framework for my particular study, I utilized what I considered to be the most relevant analytical categories illuminated in the studies in my literature review and augmented them with categories of my own creation.

### Analytical Categories

I created 17 analytical categories as the framework for coding statements related to Summitt. Thirteen of these categories were gleaned from some of the studies in my literature review and these 13 I placed in my own overarching category called “Comments Relevant to Gender.” The 13 categories combined to present Summitt’s gender role as more salient than her coaching role and privileged task-irrelevant information over task-relevant information. The remaining four categories were of my own creation and were developed so that I could code statements about Summitt that were actually relevant to coaching. These categories are: “facts,” “task-relevant,” “neutral” and “coaching role empowered through language.” Fifty-eight (58) percent of coded statements were deemed “Comments Relevant to Coaching” while forty percent (40%) of coded comments fell into the general “Comments Relevant to Gender” category. Statements generally falling into the broad category of comments relevant to gender were coded into one of 13 categories listed below, noting the scholar(s) who provided the label for the category. I will discuss the definition of the each category when I discuss the individual findings for each category.

These categories are “‘little girl’ syndrome” (Daddario 1994), “feminine apologetic” (Knight & Giuliano 2003), “feminizes content of accomplishments” (Fink & Kensicki 2001), “relationships with others” (Daddario 1994; Knight & Giuliano 2003), “reactive objects” (Messner, Duncan and Jensen 1993), “cooperative vs. competitive” (Daddario 1994), “emphasize task irrelevant” (Jones, Murrell & Jackson 1999), “first names” (Messner, Duncan & Jensen 1993; Kane & Greendorfer 1994), “infantilization” (Messner, Duncan and Jensen 1993), “non-parallel terms” (Blinde, Greendorfer & Shanker 1991), “ambivalent language” (Messner, Duncan and Jensen 1993), “condescending descriptors” (Daddario 1994), and “compensatory rhetoric” (Daddario 1994; Messner, Duncan & Jensen 1993). Within these

categories defined as statements relevant to gender, there seem to be two ways that the statements related to gender: 1) statements where Summitt's gender role is more salient than her coaching role; and 2) statements that marginalize her coaching ability through gendered language.

## DATA ANALYSIS

Before I review the specific coverage of Pat Summitt by the *New York Times*, *The Washington Post* and *USA Today*, I will present a general overview of these newspapers' coverage of men's versus women's college basketball for the time frame encompassed by my study to demonstrate "March Madness" coverage continues to be dominated by coverage of the men's tournament. While my findings are not surprising, they provide evidence for continued "symbolic annihilation" of women's sports (specifically women's college basketball) by the national print media. I will present two charts that compare men's and women's basketball coverage during "March Madness" and provide a written explanation of each graphic.

Figure 1 (see page 59) visually depicts the number of stories concerning men's and women's college basketball from March 15-April 16 that appeared in the *New York Times*, *USA Today* and *The Washington Post* for each of the six years that this study examines. Consistent with previous research (Blinde, Greendorfer & Shanker 1991; Daddario 1992; Hargreaves 1994; Jones, Murrell & Jackson 1999; Messner 1994; Messner, Messner, Duncan & Jensen 1993), coverage of the women's collegiate basketball during the time examined is not nearly that of the men's coverage—averaging just 30% of the number of men's stories. Interestingly, the years in which the coverage seems at its most equitable is in 1996 and 1997 when stories on women's college basketball were a little under half that of the stories on men's

college basketball. These two years combined for a total of 850 stories covering men's college basketball and 407 stories covering the women. This is interesting for a couple of reasons. One, in 1996 and 1997, the NCAA women's basketball tournament consisted of only 32 teams compared to 64 teams participating in the men's tournament. But, in 2003 and 2004 the women's tournament contained 64 teams, the same as the men's. One would have expected to see a noticeable increase in the number of stories concerning women in the latter years since the number of women's teams doubled. Instead, there was only a slight increase in the number of stories covering the women; 2003 and 2004 combined for a total of 446 stories about women's basketball compared to 407 stories in 1996 and 1997, an increase of only 39 stories.

In contrast, 2003 and 2004 combined for a total of 1,292 stories on men's collegiate basketball compared with a total of 850 for 1996 and 1997, a numerical increase of 442. So, overall the findings suggest only a slight numerical increase in the number of stories about women's collegiate basketball from 1996 to 2004 and actually a percentage decrease for the same time period because of the increase in the number of men's stories. In 1996 and 1997 an average of 31.5% of the stories were about women's basketball while in 2003 and 2004 the number of stories decreased to 26%.

Comparison of number of newspaper articles written about women's NCAA college basketball vs. men's NCAA college basketball appearing in the *New York Times*, *USA Today* and *Washington Post* from March 15-April 16 in 1996, 1997, 1998, 2000, 2003 and 2004

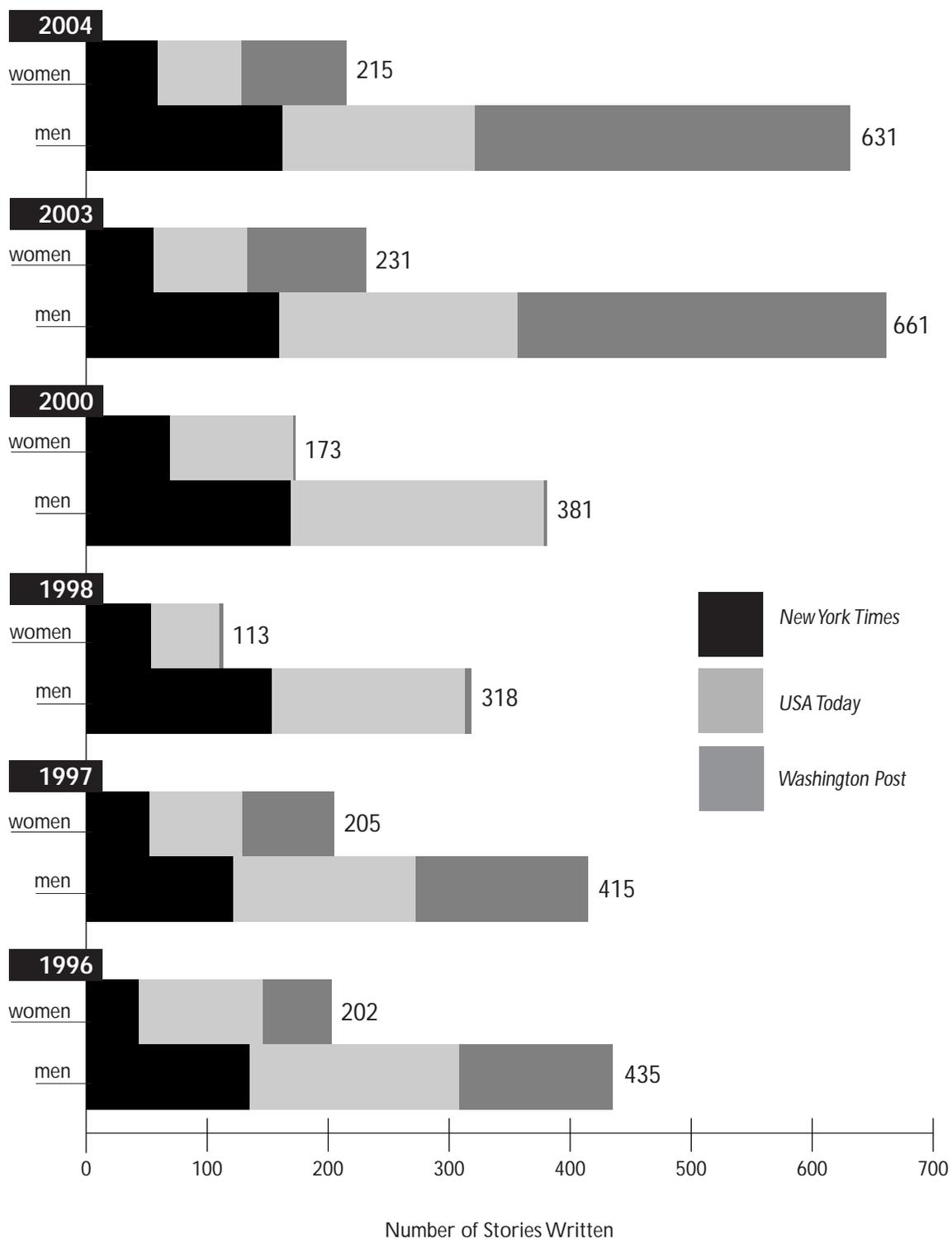


Fig. 1. Comparison of number of stories written about women's vs. men's collegiate basketball.

A second reason this lack of increase is interesting is that one would also posit an increase in women's coverage simply because of assumed progress that the passage of time allows; in this case time related to the advancement of women generally and to the passage of Title IX particularly—which, among other things, requires equitable treatment of male and female athletes both in opportunity and financial support. While it is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss the ramifications of Title IX, both its supporters and detractors agree that it is credited with increasing the number of girls and women participating in sports, particularly at the high school and collegiate levels (Kane 1996). I am not arguing that increased opportunity and participation would necessarily increase national newspaper coverage of women's sports; however, women's basketball has made many advances since 1996, including the creation of a women's professional league. And since the monthly time frame of my study encompasses what is now a 64 team women's tournament (vs. 32 in 1996), a tournament that is more professionally marketed as a “must see” event (Messner, Duncan & Wachs 1996), it would be reasonable to assume that the number of stories on women's collegiate basketball covered in these newspapers might numerically increase by more than 39 over the course of six years.

Comparison of percentage of newspaper articles written about women's NCAA college basketball vs. men's NCAA college basketball appearing in the *New York Times* vs. *USA Today* vs. *Washington Post* from March 15-April 16 in 1996, 1997, 1998, 2000, 2003 and 2004

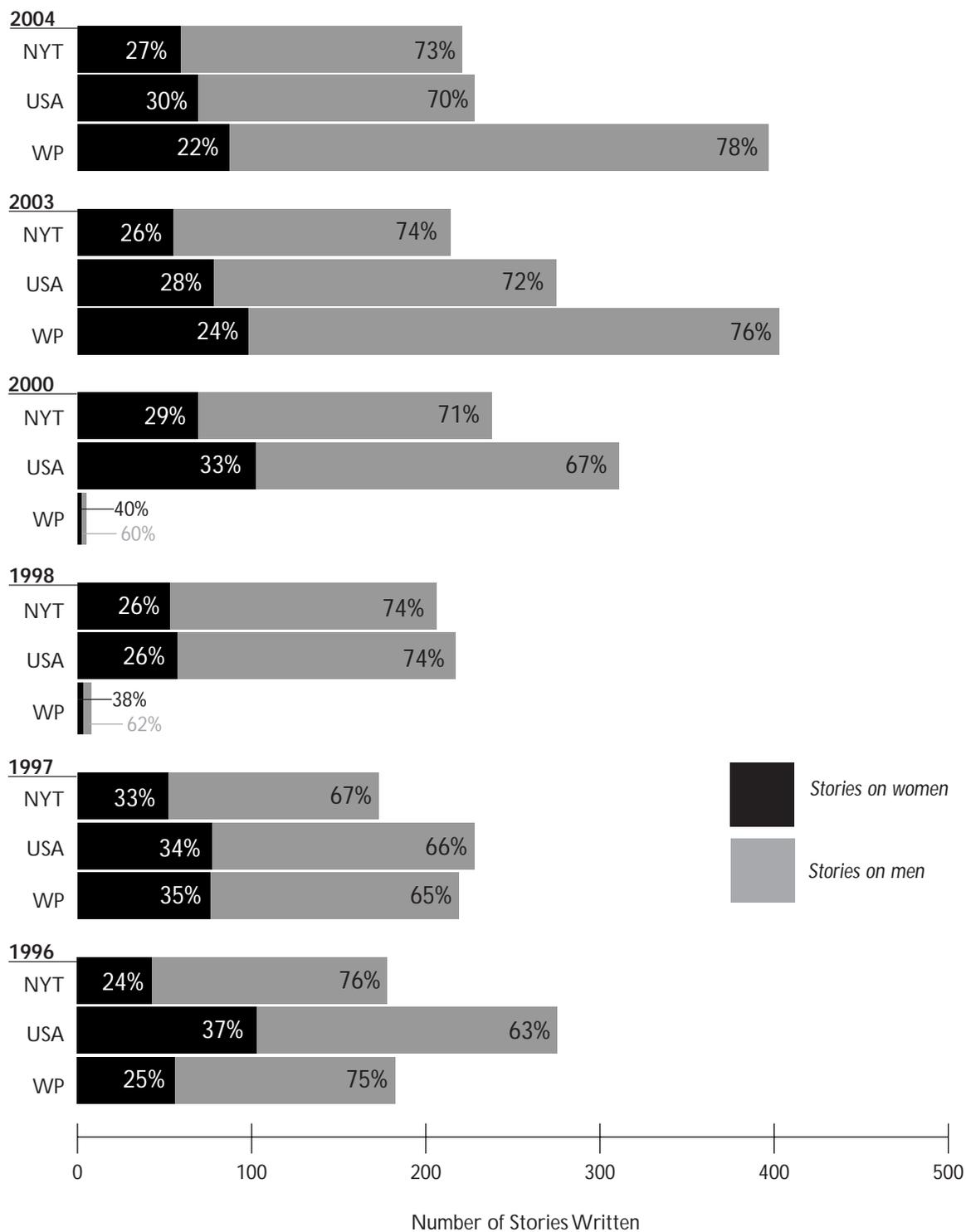


Fig. 2. Comparison of number of stories written about women's vs. men's collegiate basketball delineated by newspaper.

In further comparing the number of stories on men's versus women's collegiate basketball, Figure 2 (see page 61) breaks down this information not only by year but also by newspaper. By looking at the numbers this way, it is apparent that in 1996 *USA Today's* coverage was greater than either the *New York Times'* or *The Washington Posts'* coverage. Thirty-seven percent (37%) of NCAA collegiate basketball stories in *USA Today* were about women, followed by 25% for *The Washington Post* and 24% for the *New York Times*. 1996 was the only year that a particular newspaper's number of stories about women's collegiate basketball differed more than 4 percentage points from another's.<sup>1</sup> In the two most recent years of the study (2003 and 2004) *The Washington Post* wrote the most stories about women's collegiate basketball, *USA Today* wrote the second most and the *New York Times* wrote the least. But *The Washington Post* wrote significantly more stories about men's collegiate basketball than either of the other papers in these years as well, an average of about 40% more. So while they did write more stories about women's basketball than the other papers, the percentage of their women's versus men's stories was actually less than either *USA Today* or the *New York Times*. In general, regarding coverage of NCAA basketball, *USA Today* wrote a larger percentage of stories about women's collegiate basketball than either *The Washington Post* or the *New York Times*. And percentage-wise (not including the two years when *The Washington Post* essentially did no stories on NCAA Basketball) the *New York Times* was slightly more equitable in their number of stories than was *The Washington Post* in 2003 and 2004—averaging 26.5% for the *Times* vs. 23% for the *Post*. In 1996 and 1997, *The Washington Post*

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<sup>1</sup>As is apparent in Figures 1 and 2, *The Washington Post* in 1998 and 2000 barely covered NCAA basketball at all, either for the men or women. In 1998, *The Washington Post* wrote 3 stories covering the women and 8 stories covering the men. In 2000 they wrote 2 stories on the women and 5 on the men. The reason for this lack of coverage is not known and should not be of concern since this study is ultimately concerned with the content of the women's stories.

was slightly more equitable than the *New York Times*—averaging 30% for the *Post* and 28.5% for the *Times*.

In sum, Figures 1 and 2 (pages 59 and 61 respectively) demonstrate the amount of coverage that women's collegiate basketball receives in comparison to the amount devoted to men's collegiate basketball in these newspapers. My findings support previous research (Blinde, Greendorfer & Shanker 1991; Jones, Murrell & Jackson 1999; Messner 1994; Messner, Messner, Duncan & Jensen 1993) asserting that women's athletics does not receive the same amount of coverage as men's athletics.

While my study focuses on the type/content of coverage rather than the quantity, it is important to note that my findings show that women's stories amount to an average of only 30% of the total number of stories about NCAA basketball during "March Madness." I have included the previous figures in this research because they demonstrate the potential import of the stories that are written about women's sports. Because readers are exposed to a fewer number of stories, the content of these stories is perhaps more powerful/influential simply because there is less information available to the readership about the subject. Therefore, what the stories focus on and how they are written can potentially have greater influence on the public's perception and attitudes about women's sports, women athletes and female coaches. With that in mind, I will next report on the number of stories written by these newspapers concerning Pat Summitt during the previously-delineated time frame and then review my findings regarding each of my analytical categories.

Figure 3 (page 64) visually represents the number of newspaper articles containing Pat Summitt's name appearing in these three newspapers during the time frame encompassing this study.

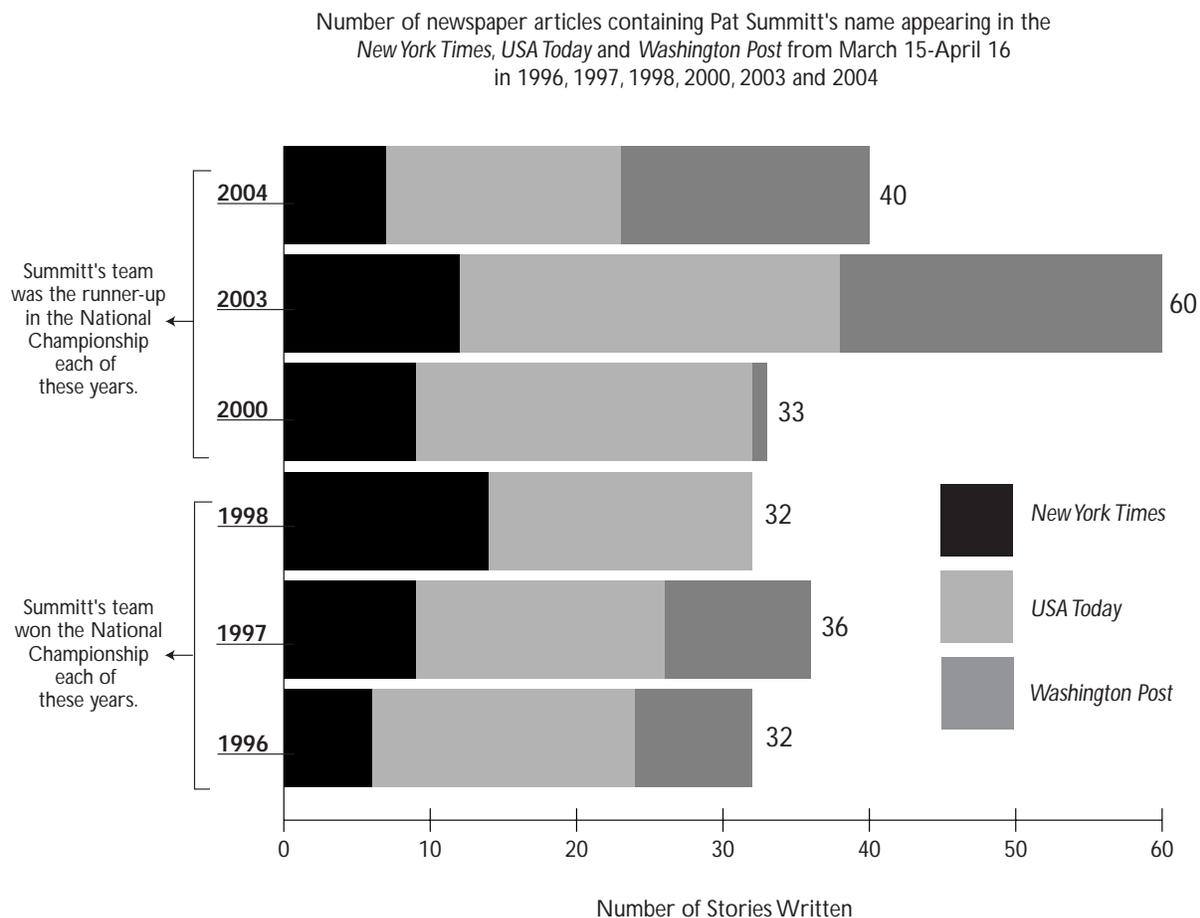


Fig. 3. Number of stories written containing Pat Summitt's name appearing in the *New York Times*, *USA Today* and *Washington Post* from March 15-April 16 in 1996, 1997, 1998, 2000, 2003 and 2004.

While the total number of stories on collegiate women's basketball remained almost constant over the six-year period, the number of stories containing Summitt's name in 2003 and 2004 combined for a total of 100 stories while in 1996 and 1997 stories referencing Summitt totalled 68, even though her team won the national title in 1996 and 1997 while losing in the finals in 2003 and 2004. In 2003, the most stories containing Summitt's name were written—60. This same year also saw the most stories written about women's college basketball—231.

So, over one quarter of all stories on women's NCAA basketball during "March Madness" 2003 mentioned Pat Summitt—a year that she did not win the national championship. The year that she won her third consecutive national championship—1998—she was mentioned in more than 28% of the stories. In the remaining years of my examination (1996, 1997, 2000 and 2004) she was mentioned in an average of 18% of the stories.

#### Overview Findings Regarding Coverage of Pat Summitt

Broadly speaking, 58% of the coded statements were comments considered relevant to Summitt's coaching while 40% of the coded sentences were considered comments relevant to Summitt's gender. Two percent of the statements in my analysis were coded in the "other" category. In the sentences coded as "Comments Relevant to Coaching," 52% of them presented the coaching role as more salient than gender role while 6% empowered Summitt's coaching ability through language. In the sentences coded as "Comments Relevant to Gender," 29.5% presented Summitt's gender role as more salient than her coaching role, while 10.5% of these sentences marginalized Summitt's coaching ability through gendered language. See Figures 4 and 5 (page 66).

While it was found that these newspapers did focus on Pat Summitt the coach in more than half of the statements, 40% of the time they focused on what previous researchers argue are statements that marginalize or trivialize her coaching role by focusing somehow on her gender role (Knight & Giuliano 2003; Fink & Kensicki 2001; Jones, Murrell & Jackson 1999; Daddario 1994; Kane & Greendorfer 1994; Messner, Duncan and Jensen 1993; Blinde, Greendorfer & Shanker 1991). While it is beyond the scope of this study, future researchers could examine how this ratio of focus on coaching role versus gender role compares to that of male coaches. Because research has shown that gender role is not as salient when individuals

### Coaching Relevant vs. Gender Relevant Comments

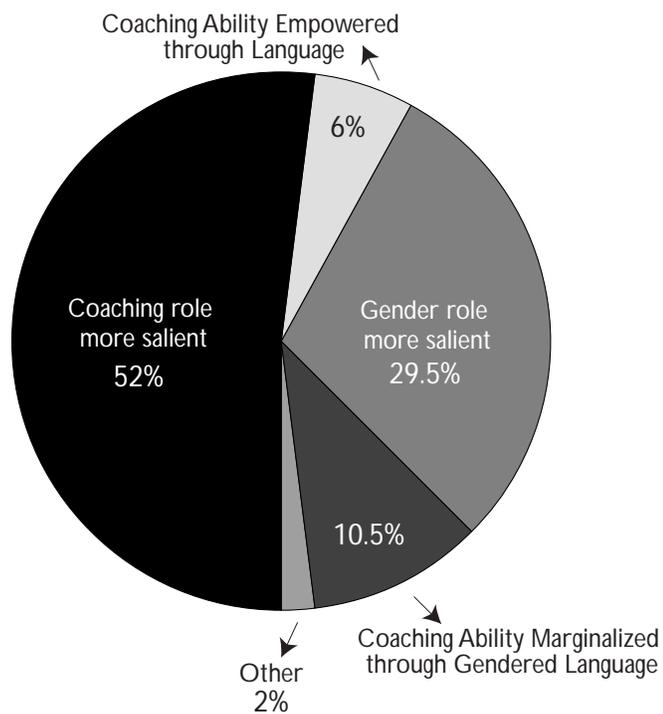
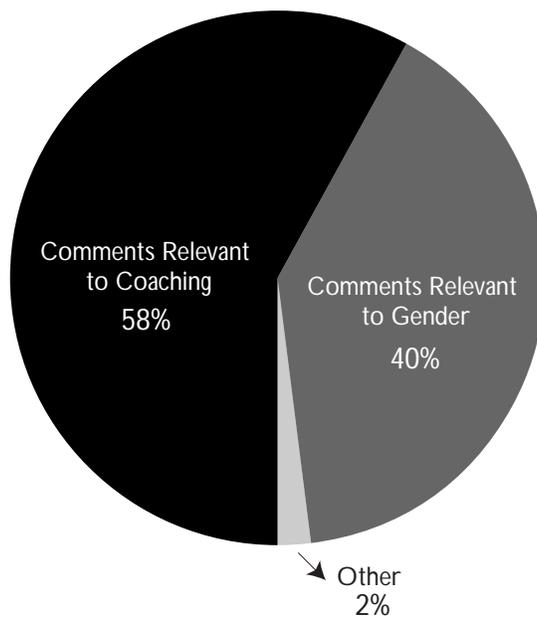


Fig. 5. Percentage of statements perceived as privileging Pat Summitt's coaching role versus percentage of statements related to her gender role and percentage of statements empowering her coaching ability versus marginalizing her coaching ability through gendered language.

participate in gender-appropriate sports (Jones, Murrell & Jackson 1999; Knight & Giuliano 2003), I would posit that statements made in these same newspapers regarding male coaches would focus on almost exclusively on their coaching role and not on extraneous, task-irrelevant comments. Since male coaches are in a profession that is viewed as “gender-appropriate,” their proper gendered behavior is likely a non-issue. Since Pat Summitt is not in a gender-appropriate profession, some evidence of her as a proper heterosexual female must be presented. In my view, this issue of Summitt being portrayed as a properly heterosexual female seems to be the underlying point of all of the statements that privilege Summitt’s gender role over her coaching role and relates to assertions by several scholars regarding society’s fear that female athletes and coaches tend to be lesbians (Cohen 2001; Griffin 2001; Hargreaves 1994; Birrell & Theberge 1994; Knight & Giuliano 2003). I will expand on this assertion and its ramifications in the summaries describing the individual findings for each analytical category.

Before I discuss each individual category, I have included two charts that provide an overview of my findings. Figure 6 (page 68) visually depicts my analytical categories, my broader organizational categories, and contains a percentage breakdown of occurrences for each category. Figure 7 (page 69) shows the breakdown of categories occurrences found in each newspaper.

Analytical Categories and Percentage of Occurance in all newspaper articles

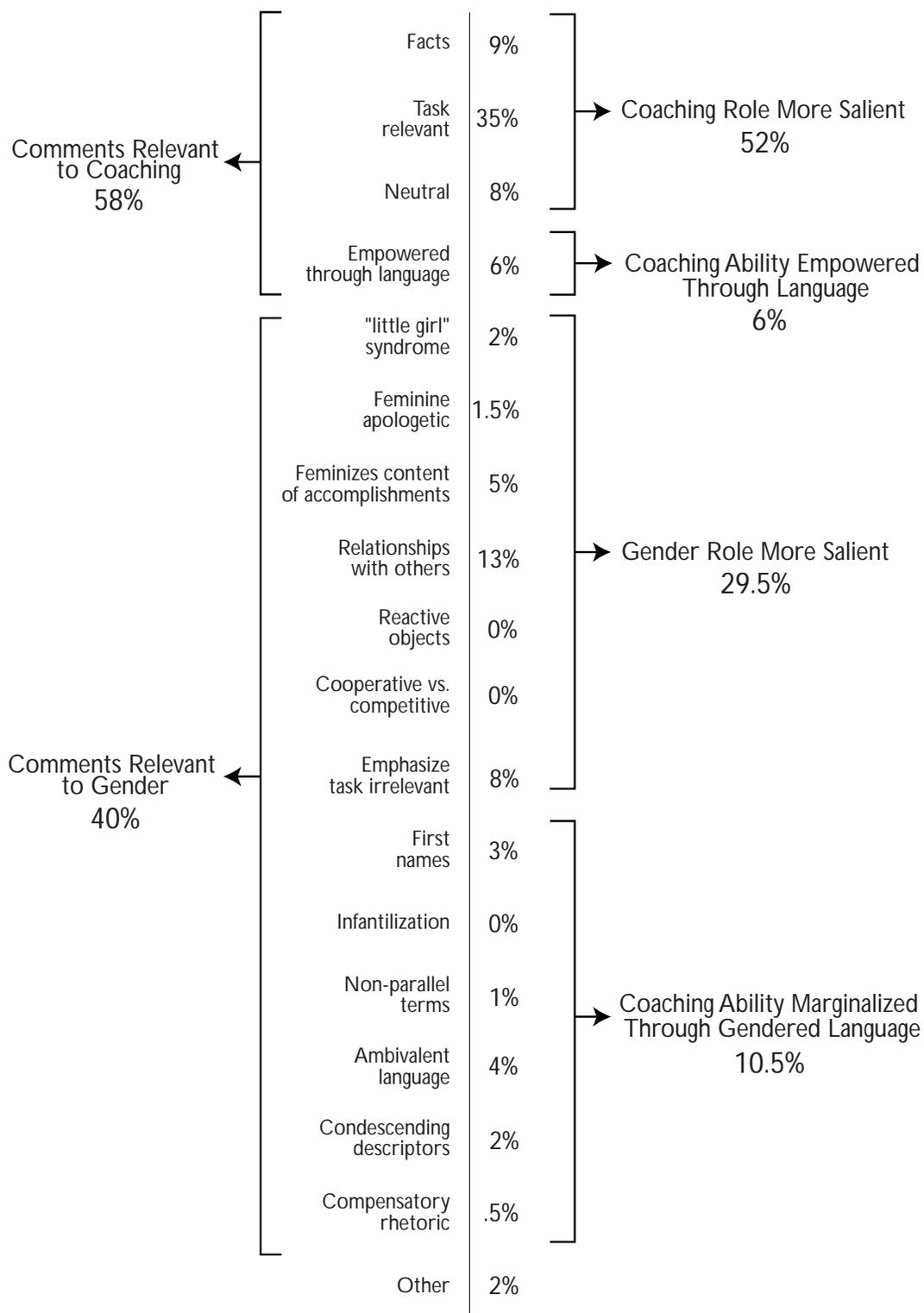


Fig. 6. List of Analytical Categories used for coding statements regarding Pat Summitt found in the *New York Times*, *USA Today* and *Washington Post* from March 15-April 16 in 1996, 1997, 1998, 2000, 2003 and 2004.

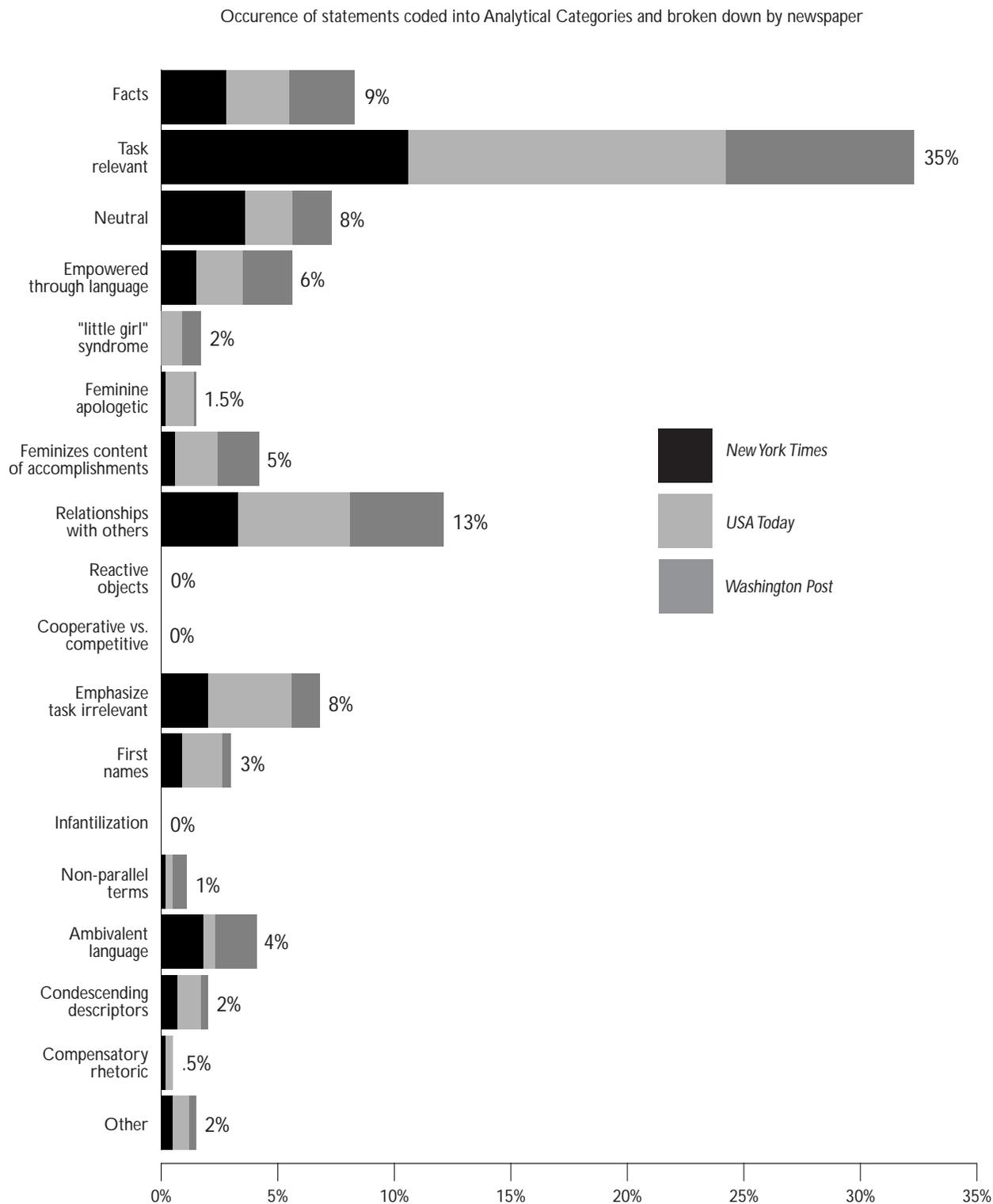


Fig. 7. Occurrences of statements regarding Pat Summitt coded into Analytical Categories used found in the *New York Times*, *USA Today* and *Washington Post* from March 15-April 16 in 1996, 1997, 1998, 2000, 2003 and 2004 broken down by newspaper.

## Analysis of the Analytical Categories:

### Summary of Coded Statements Relevant to Coaching

As I review each analytical category, I will provide a definition of the category, note what percentage of statements were coded into the particular category, provide some examples from my research sample (if any), and provide my thoughts on the findings as they relate to previous research. I will begin by discussing the statements regarding Pat Summitt that fall into my general category of “Comments Relevant to Coaching.”

My research found that 58% of the time, statements by or about Pat Summitt in the *New York Times*, *USA Today* and *The Washington Post* during the period of study were relevant to coaching. Four analytical categories fall under this general heading: “facts,” “task-relevant,” “neutral” and “coaching role empowered through language.” By far, most of the statements relevant to coaching fell into the “task-relevant” category, the category that garnered 35% of the statements coded in the entire sample—a percentage more than twice that of the next highest-percentage category. Interestingly more than 65% of these task-relevant comments were direct quotes from Pat Summitt. This suggests that Summitt herself has some control over her representation via the media. Because coaches are interviewed at press conferences, both before and after these tournament games, the likelihood of having direct quotes from them in newspaper articles is probably a greater possibility than quotes from participating athletes. If the press poses task-relevant questions then it is not surprising they will receive task-relevant responses. And the tendency of the authors in my study is to directly quote Summitt rather than make task-relevant comments of their own volition.

### Facts

This category is one of the four that fall under the overarching group of comments that fall under “Comments Relevant to Coaching” and its definition is relatively self-evident. I coded a statement as “fact” when it included an assertion that was verifiable as factual. These are stated facts without editorializing or embellishment. The comments in this category are simply facts that relate to Pat Summitt and her achievements exemplified as follows:

“Tennessee is coached by Pat Summitt, who has won six collegiate championships and 820 games, more than any other Division I coach” (Longman, J. 2003, April 3). “She [Summitt] has more national championships than any college basketball coach except John Wooden (Watts, A. 2003, April 8). “This month she became the first female coach placed on the cover of *Sports Illustrated*” (Longman, J. 1998, March 26). “She [Summitt] played at Tennessee-Martin and was co-captain of the U.S. team that won a silver medal in the ’76 Olympics [...] She coached the ’84 Olympic team to a gold” (Milhoces, G. 1997, March 27). Such facts are particularly important when they directly attest to Summitt’s athletic and coaching achievements, furthering the argument that women can have success in the world of sport. Comments in this category represented 9% of the total sentences coded. None of the statements in this category were quotes from Summitt or anyone else. So while the authors of these articles tended to quote Summitt when she made task-relevant statements rather than making them themselves, they were the ones providing factual information about Summitt in terms of her coaching (and playing) record.

### Task-Relevant

This category is the second of four I created to counterbalance the analytical categories used as a result of previous research outlined in my literature review. Comments coded as

“task-relevant” specifically address comments related to basketball in general, a specific game or strategy, or anything actually relevant to Summitt’s role as a coach. Examples of such sentences include the following statements. “‘She probably does her best coaching when she doesn’t have the superstar with the big ego, when she doesn’t have to worry about getting any one player her shots,’ said Mickie DeMoss, Summitt’s former assistant and chief recruiter, who this season became the head coach at Kentucky” (Araton, H. 2004, April 5). “Summitt wasn’t interested in Villanova’s pace so much as the Wildcats’ ability to move without the ball” (Orton, K. 2003, March 30). “Pat is an inside-outside coach, though she’s expanded her offense the last couple of years” (Lieberman-Cline, N. 1997, March 26).

Thirty-five percent of the coded sentences fall into this category—more than twice as many occurrences in this category as the next highest percentage (13% of comments fell into “Relationship with Others” category). As stated earlier, more than 65% of these comments were direct quotes from Pat Summitt herself exemplified by the following: “‘In this tournament,’ Summitt said, ‘if you’re a basketball coach going against a player like Seimone Augustus, like Whalen, whoever it might be, you have to make that a priority in your defensive scheme’” (Reedy, J. 2004, April 7). “Summitt said she thought there were two keys to the game—a zone the Vols clamped on in the closing minutes, and their rebounding strength” (Allen, K. 2000, March 28).

Since this study is the first of its kind to explore how a female coach is presented, the fact that Summitt has more opportunity to speak for herself via press conferences after every game may or may not influence the number of task-relevant statements found versus task-relevant statements made about female athletes. However, there are no direct numbers to compare because previous research has not reported on the number of task-relevant statements regarding female athletes. Future research could be designed to compare occurrences of task-

relevant to task-irrelevant statements made by or about female athletes in order to see how the ratio compares to my overall findings.

It is also important to note that in the press conference scenario coaches and athletes are responding to the questions they are asked. The choice of questions could reflect the asker's bias, while whether and how to answer a particular question could be influenced by cultural pressures placed on the female athlete or coach due to gender role expectations.

### Neutral

The "Neutral" category is the third category that falls under the broader "Comments Relevant to Coaching" section. Comments coded as neutral were those comments relevant to basketball but not particularly focused on or addressing a specific action or event. Examples include the following three statements. "Summitt had kind comments of her own Tuesday night" (Brennan, C. 2004, April 7). "Seimone Augustus gets all the attention, but seniors Temeka Johnson and Doneeka Hodges supply more than enough quickness to worry Tennessee coach Pat Summitt" ("Back Courts." 2004, April 4). "Michelle Snow hides her face as she sits on the bench with Tamika Catchings and coach Pat Summitt" (Allen, K. 2000, April 4). Comments coded in the neutral category accounted for 8% of the total. These neutral comments suggest that these authors are in many cases focusing on what they should be when covering Summitt—the game of basketball.

### Coaching Role Empowered through Language

This category is the final of four that I created beneath the general heading "Comments Relevant to Coaching." I placed statements in this category that seemed to strengthen/legitimize Summitt's coaching role by either comparing her to another great coach (in my sample she was

always compared to a male college coach for a men's team) or by using descriptive language in a positive, empowering way to describe her coaching ability. Words including "masterful," "powerful," "dominant," "brilliant," and "intense" are descriptors that imply competence for coaches of either sex. Statements coded into this category accounted for only 6% of all coded statements. Examples are quoted in the the paragraph that follows.

"Indeed, there is something Wooden-esque about the way Summitt coaches the game. [...] With the title on the line, Summitt was masterful" (Climer, D. 1997, April 1). "'Pat's plan to wear down Ticha was brilliant,' Larry said. 'She doesn't turn the ball over 11 times in three games let alone one game'" (Shipley, A. 1997, March 31). "Pat Summitt is the dean of big-time coaches in women's basketball" ("Tennessee." 1996, March 29). "How many coaches in all of sports have remained relevant, much less dominant, in four different decades?" (Zinser, L. 2004, April 5). This type of statement sends the message that Summitt is a valid member of her profession, and the fact that she is compared directly to a well-respected male coach somehow particularly legitimizes her coaching role. The March 29, 1996 story that refers to her as "the dean" of women's basketball subtly communicates to basketball fans a comparison between Summitt and Coach Dean Smith. It is encouraging to discover these types of statements even though they represent only 6% of the sample. It would be interesting to see in what percentage of statements male coaches are empowered through language by these same newspapers.

In sum, statements coded in the preceding four analytical categories that comprise "Comments Relevant to Coaching" account for 58% of the statements made by or about Pat Summitt for the time frame outlined in this study. Since there is no comparison of what would be considered relevant comments versus irrelevant comments in previous research, I am not sure what this finding says as it relates to previous research. Previous research has looked at the ways in which females have been marginalized and trivialized in their athletic roles but has not

attempted any kind of gender irrelevant versus gender relevant comparison. This percentage looks pretty good at first glance but there are some interesting things to note. The main observation is that the majority of comments falling into this overarching category are coded in the “task-relevant” category (35%) and more than 65% of these statements were made by Summitt herself. It could be argued that Summitt is responsible for most of the comments in the sample that are relevant to her coaching role. But as will be discussed in the “Comments Relevant to Gender” examination, she is also responsible for a number of statements that focus on her gender role. Of course, many of the statements in this study are garnered from pre- and post-game press conferences where Summitt is responding to questions asked by the media. And what is influencing what they ask?

A second observation is merely speculation on my part and perhaps the basis for further research: what percentage of a male women’s basketball coach’s coverage would be coverage relevant to coaching? What percentage would be relevant to his gender role? My hunch is that a much greater percentage of it would be relevant to coaching since male coaches are in a gender-appropriate vocation. I do know that, in reviewing my sample, I looked at articles containing statements about Geno Auriemma, male coach of the University of Connecticut’s women’s basketball team. Many of the articles about Summitt also discussed Auriemma, because he was a major rival of Summitt’s during the years included in my study. In fact, his team defeated Summitt in the last three championship games (2004, 2003 and 2000). While from reading these articles, I know Summitt’s husband’s name and profession, I know her son’s name and affinity for cutting a piece of the net at championships, I know Summitt’s father’s name and what her relationship with him was/is like, I know where she played basketball and that she played on the ’76 Olympic team, etc. In contrast, Auriemma’s family was mentioned only once in all of the coverage that I reviewed which, keep in mind, was coverage during the NCAA

Division I basketball championship. What I know is that his wife and two children were sitting in the stands and were looking anxious because of the way the game was going. I am not saying that I do not know other things about Auriemma that are not relevant to his coaching role. But I did not gain this knowledge from these newspapers' coverage of the NCAA women's basketball tournament. Perhaps future research could attempt a direct comparison of coverage between these two coaches and see how many statements about them are relevant to coaching versus focus on family relationships or other task-irrelevant issues.

The next section will articulate my findings for the analytical categories that were selected from the studies in my literature review. I have created an overarching category for all of these statements called "Comments Relevant to Gender."

#### Analysis of the Analytical Categories:

##### Summary of Coded Statements Relevant to Gender

The remaining 13 coding categories in my study are categories that were illuminated during my literature review relative to media representations of female athletes, and these categories represent the heart of my study. These are all categories in which the female athlete's gender role is more salient than her athletic role (or coaching role in the case of Summitt). Guided by this previous research, I found that 40% of the statements in my sample characterized Summitt's gender role as more salient than her coaching role. This happens in two overarching ways—one is the emphasis on aspects of the athlete (coach) focusing more on gender role characterizations than on athletic (coaching) performance, while the other focuses more on how the female athlete is marginalized through language.

There are 13 categories in this section—seven which I place under the umbrella of depicting gender role more salient than athletic (coaching) role and six which address

marginalization of athletes through language. First, I will address the categories that fall under the “Gender Role more Salient” umbrella—“‘little girl’ syndrome” (Daddario 1994), “feminine apologetic” (Knight & Giuliano 2003), “feminizes content of accomplishments” (Fink & Kensicki 2001), “relationships with others” (Daddario 1994; Knight & Giuliano 2003), “reactive objects” (Messner, Duncan and Jensen 1993), “cooperative vs. competitive” (Daddario 1994) and “emphasize task-irrelevant” (Jones, Murrell and Jackson 1999).

The statements coded in these categories will provide examples of the ways in which Summitt’s coaching role takes a back seat to her “proper” gender role. By focusing on characterizations that privilege her gender role over her coaching role, Summitt’s coaching stature is diminished, trivialized and marginalized. Because these categories were garnered from many studies, some of which expanded on previous studies also included in my project, these categories cannot be described as mutually exclusive. In several instances, a single statement effectively marginalizes Summitt in more than one way—that is, it can be coded into more than one analytical category. The important point is that this section looks at *what* was said and how the content of a particular statement characterizes Summitt in gender stereotypic ways.

#### “Little Girl” Syndrome

This category name is taken from the 1994 work of Daddario who, in looking at the language of sportscasters, examined the host network’s (CBS) discourse in the 1992 Winter Olympic Games in an effort to explore the marginalization of women athletes. She argues that although the mass media can help advance women’s equality in sport they “fail to challenge the sexist ideology that pervades the institution of sport ... [that is] revealed through the hegemonic strategy of marginalization” (276). Her rhetorical analysis concluded that women athletes were marginalized by the commentators in several ways, one of which she called the “little girl”

syndrome. She describes this “syndrome” as “sexual diminishment of women athletes by casting many as adolescents and ‘little girl’ daughters despite their chronological ages” (282).

In my study, I found that Summitt was characterized in this way in 2% of the coded statements. Interestingly, the majority of the characterizations occurred in 1996, and they related to the fact that after her team won the championship her father hugged and kissed her. All three newspapers reported on the exchange and an article in the *Washington Post* titled “Summitt’s Triumph is a Family Affair” focused heavily on it. Below is an excerpt.

After the final buzzer sounded and the Lady Vols held their raucous, on-court celebration, Richard Head hugged and kissed his daughter. [...] It’s not that Summitt thought her father didn’t love her. She just didn’t know if she would ever do enough to make him proud. [...] “To tell you how big this is,” Summitt said later, in her postgame news conference, “today, my dad hugged me and kissed me for the first time in 43 years” (Frey, J. 1996, April 1).

This story seems to imply that Summitt seeks the approval of her father, and the fact that he finally showed her some affection means that she can be satisfied because her dad loves her. Her competitive drive is subtly related to her a quest for approval from her father. If the message is that her motivation is paternal approval then that message speaks more to her gender role than her coaching role and could serve to trivialize her coaching achievements by focusing more on the traditional gender role of the dutiful daughter. Interestingly, it seems that it was Summitt who provided the media with the comment that led them to focus on the father/daughter angle and it is impossible to determine if all of the newspapers reported on the hug and kiss because they heard her speak about it at the press conference or witnessed it on the court

and felt it was worth mentioning. What is significant to my study is the opportunity this provided the media to hold to prevailing sexual stereotypes by portraying Summit in a gender-appropriate way.

Another example of “little girl” syndrome which was also covered in all three newspapers is a response which Summitt gave at a press conference where her relationship with Gene Auriemma, the Connecticut women’s coach, was what the reporters wanted to know about. (The propensity of these newspapers to cover the relationship between Summitt and Auriemma will be addressed in a later analytical category.) Summitt was asked what she thought about Auriemma’s characterizations of her. “‘If I said the things that Geno does, even today, my 80-year-old father would probably take me out behind the shed and whip me with a tobacco stick,’ she said” (Watts, A. 2003, April 8). This image of a grown woman (read little girl) being disciplined by her father is at odds with the image of Summitt as a grown woman, much less a strong coach. Arguably, one of the central roles of a college coach is that of disciplinarian, so this disciplining of the disciplinarian by her father could serve to marginalize/undermine her coaching role. Interestingly, once again it was Summitt who provided this characterization to the media, and all three newspapers in this study printed some iteration of it.

These statements are certainly consistent with Daddario’s 1994 definition of the “little girl” syndrome, and, while such statements constitute just 2% of those classified under “Gender Role More Salient,” they have power greater than their numbers suggest because of the strong images they evoke and because they tend to be picked up and disseminated widely. All the newspapers in my survey published some version of both these stories. What is curious is that both came directly from or were directly supported by something Summit said in a press conference. Are cultural pressures such that Summit is a willing participant in articulating her proper gender role or giving a “properly-gendered performance” to use the parlance of

Judith Butler (1990)?

### Feminine Apologetic

This category is derived from a 2003 study by Knight and Giuliano who assert that a societal fear that female athletes are likely lesbians is behind the tendency of the sports media to employ a “feminine apologetic” whereby they “heterosexualize female athletes by emphasizing their relationship with men” (272). Their article titled “Blood, Sweat, and Jeers: The Impact of the Media’s Heterosexist Portrayals on Perceptions of Male and Female Athletes” explores how both male and female athletes may likely be viewed as homosexual if they participate in a gender-inappropriate sport. Since being a successful athlete, particularly in a gender-inappropriate team sport contradicts a woman’s prescribed societal gender role, they argue that “female athletes are required to overcompensate for their masculine behavior on the field by acting in traditionally feminine ways off the field” (273).

I found that 1.5% of the sentences in my sample fell into this category. Some of these examples focus on the fact that Summitt has a husband and a son, thereby ensuring her heterosexuality for the reader. In a 1996 story about Tennessee’s national championship victory, *USA Today* reported, “[t]hen she and her husband, R.B. Summitt, watched a tape of the game (Patrick, D. 1996, April 2). *USA Today* informed their readership in 1997 that, “[h]er husband is banker R.B. Summitt. They have a son, Ross Tyler, 6. (Mihoces, G. 1997, March 27). In this example, the reader not only learns of the existence of a husband and son, but we also learn what her husband does for a living. This information assures the reader that Summitt’s heterosexuality is not in question even though her profession is not gender-appropriate. Summitt herself assures the readership of her heterosexuality: “I don’t know what I would do with myself if I retired,” she said. “I would drive my husband and my son crazy for one and

probably myself. I love this game, win or lose” (Watts, A. 2003. April 9).

Throughout the six years covered in my study, these newspapers find it necessary to periodically mention Summitt’s familial relationships. Auriemma’s kids, nor any other male coaches’ children, are featured in the way that Summitt’s son, Ross Tyler, has been. His picture has appeared in these newspapers cutting down portions of the net after Tennessee’s various title wins. Was Ross Tyler more interested in basketball at ages 6, 7 and 8 than Auriemma’s or Andy Landers’ (coach of the University of Georgia women) children? Would it be considered a weakness for a male coach to have his children participate in his work success? Is it necessary for a woman to have her children/husband/boyfriend be visible to the public when her vocation is not gender-appropriate because then her heterosexuality is verifiable? Is Summitt more attentive to her child (or expected to be) than her male counterparts because being a mother is one of her proper gender roles?

There is no NCAA Division I female basketball coach past or present who has “announced” her lesbianism. Yet there are Division I female coaches who are lesbians just as some of their athletes are. Why doesn’t the media focus on the personal familial lives of unmarried female coaches? I assert that this tendency to focus on Summitt’s familial situation provides evidence of the feminine apologetic and that it also exemplifies hegemony at work on everyone, Pat Summitt included.

What I found most intriguing in this category was the number of statements that focused in a heterosexualized way on the relationship between Harry Perretta, coach of the Villanova women’s basketball team, Geno Auriemma, coach of the University of Connecticut women, and Pat Summitt. In 2003, Summitt had contacted Perretta to see if he would show her a particular offense that she determined would be the best offense to defeat Auriemma’s team. Using what she had learned from Perretta and adapting it to her needs, Summitt was able to defeat

Auriemma, his team's only loss that season. Rather than being praised as having the wherewithal to make such a judgement and then set about mastering a new offensive strategy, the story was covered in what I consider an overtly heterosexualized way. Below is an excerpt from a 2003 *New York Times* story entitled "Friend Gets Tangled in Coaches' Rivalry."

At the women's Final Four, where UConn and Tennessee will tip off tonight for the national championship, the gender battle is first and foremost over a basketball game. Second, it is something of a sitcom, *When Harry Met Patty*. Who is Harry? He is Harry Perretta, who has, comically speaking, come between the dysfunctional first coaching couple of the women's college game. [...] "Pat thinks he is going steady with her," Auriemma said. "He left me for an older woman," Auriemma lamented last week. [...] "I would never do anything to come between Geno and Harry," Summitt claimed yesterday (Aaraton, H. 2003, April 8).

The "gender battle" to which the writer refers is between the coaches since both of the teams are women's teams. Why is it characterized as a gender battle? What kind of battle is being fought when Summitt competes against female coaches?

Likening this occurrence to a sitcom and further analogizing it to the movie "When Harry Met Sally" clearly illustrates the feminine apologetic at work. Also, in this same story the *Times* stated that Summitt "solicited" Harry for his help. I think that the use of this particular word combined with the story line sends an intentioned message—"Patty" was using her feminine wiles to get what she wanted from Harry. Use of the word "claimed" in the last sentence to describe Summitt's assertion seems to me an interesting choice by the reporter as well. Does its use imply that the writer does not believe Summitt?

A different reporter from *The New York Times* also reported in an earlier story on the Summitt/Perretta/Auriemma “love triangle.”

Ever since that meeting last summer, Perretta and Summitt have become fast friends. “I am jealous,” Auriemma told *The Hartford Courant*. [...] “Harry and I used to be in the hot tub together.” [...] Summitt gave Perretta four ties, which he has worn at several games this season, including an orange one he displayed during Villanova’s 53-51 victory against Colorado on Saturday in the regional semifinals (Berstein, V. 2003, April).

Again, Summitt is heterosexualized, but this time it perhaps marginalizes Summitt’s coaching role even more than by mentioning her husband and son because Perretta and Auriemma are her professional rivals on the court. Instead of focusing on a task-relevant issue (like mastering a new offense to prepare for a particular team), these stories sexualize the relationship between these coaches and characterize Summitt in a gender stereotypic way. In 2003, in the four weeks included in my study, the *New York Times* wrote a total of only 12 stories containing some reference to Summitt and three of them focused on this Summitt/Perretta/Auriemma “love triangle.” During the same time *The Washington Post* wrote 17 articles containing a Summitt reference and four of them focused on the “relationship.” And in *USA Today* there were 19 total stories referencing Summitt and two featured the “relationship.” The fact that nine stories focused on Summitt’s relationship with these two male coaches in a sexualized way provides further evidence of the feminine apologetic as articulated by Knight and Giuliano in 2003.

Also, the direct quotes from Auriemma in this story are worthy of further comment. The “I am jealous” and “Harry and I used to be in the hot tub together” quips (along with an earlier one that Perretta “left me for an older woman”) are interesting in that one would think such

statements could potentially open him up to charges of homosexuality. I suggest there is no danger of that because Auriemma, unlike Summitt, is in a sport considered gender-appropriate for a male and he is so comfortable in that role that he feels free to joke around. This is also consistent with Knight and Giuliano's 2003 finding that the sexual orientation of males engaged in male-appropriate pursuits simply does not come into question, but male and female athletes alike are subject to more concern and speculation about sexual orientation if they engage in pursuits considered improper for their gender in the prevailing ideology.

#### Feminizes Content of Accomplishments

This category was garnered from a 2001 study by Fink and Kensicki (2002) that found that articles in *Sports Illustrated for Women*, although the articles about female athletes were predominantly sport related, did little to challenge the existing stereotypes of female athletes and female consumers. They argue that the magazine portrayed female athletes in a way that feminized the content of their athletic accomplishments and trivialized their athletic achievements. The statements I coded into this category feminized Summitt's accomplishments in a similar way that the female athletes were in the Fink and Kinsicki (2002) study, and 5% of the coded statements fell into this analytical category. In a 1998 *New York Times* article, the focus was on Summitt's jewelry. "The coach has also gone through the season without having to have her rings reshaped. 'This team has been easy on my jewelry,' Summitt said. Occasionally, Summitt pounds them flat by slapping her palms on the court during moments of exasperation" (Longman, J. 1998, March 26).

In 1997, *USA Today* reported that "[i]n February, Summitt, 44, was honored at a White House luncheon as one of the "25 Most Influential Working Mothers" (Mihoces, G. 1997, March 29). Granted she was not the NCAA women's coach of the year or SEC women's coach

of the year in 1997 (she won one or both these distinctions four times in the 1990's) but why report on this particular honor? Does the White House honor the "25 Most Influential Working Fathers"? Is the message that Summitt's role of mother trumps her role as coach?

In 1996, *USA Today's* Bryan Burwell commented on Summitt's fashion sense.

"Speaking of bad suits, where did Tennessee's Pat Summitt find that garish dreamsicle orange number she wore during the women's final? The couture section of Piggly Wiggly?" (Burwell, B. 1996, April 5). She may have coached her team to a second straight national title in 1996 but what sort of woman would allow herself to be seen in such an outfit? And never mind that Tennessee's primary school color is "dreamsicle orange."

In all of the above examples, Summitt's stereotypic gender role is more salient than her coaching role, and the way in which her accomplishments are trivialized/marginalized in this category is through what Fink and Kensicki would define as feminizing the content of her accomplishments.

Another example of this category follows. As the coach of a Division I powerhouse, Summitt must possess strong recruiting skills to convince the best players to choose Tennessee. She must sign the best players before she can ever coach them. All three newspapers in my sample felt it newsworthy to report on a 1990 recruiting trip. (Note that the earliest year in my study is six years later than that trip—1996.)

Summitt and Marciniak are aligned in a way that probably will never happen in the men's game. Summitt was pregnant in 1990 when she was trying to recruit Marciniak out of high school, and she went into labor on her trip to Marciniak's home (Weir, T. 1996, April 1).

Is this what the media find newsworthy? And why is it being covered in some way by each of

the three newspapers (as well as *Sports Illustrated*) in 1996 when the “incident” took place and she gave birth in 1990, six years earlier. If the details of Vice President Dick Cheney’s shooting a man during a hunting accident is none of the American people’s business, then why are the details of Summitt’s pregnancy important for the general public to know—especially six years after the fact? The story does illustrate a moment when Summitt’s gender role trumped her coach and recruiter role in a dramatic way. Never mind that it was old news or that she successfully recruited Marciniak for Tennessee.

### Relationships with Others

This category, as with the “little girl” syndrome, is derived from the research of Daddario (1994). She asserts that even as female athletes are succeeding in masculine-identified sports they “are still being evaluated and characterized according to a male-defined set of criteria” (286) and, among other things, they are much more likely to be portrayed through their relationships with others than male athletes. She says that coverage of Olympic speed skater and gold medalist Bonnie Blair exemplified such treatment by the media. In media coverage, Blair was continually referred to as “America’s favorite girl next door” and “American’s little sister,” which according to Daddario served to diminish her athletic stature and undermine her identity as an Olympic athlete (286). Daddario did point out that during the event the media refrained from revealing her romantic status, but I would argue that if Blair had a boyfriend, husband or other significant male other, then the media would have told us. The closest male connection that the media could make was her relationship with her big brother and that is why the media chose to characterize her as “America’s little sister.”

This analytical category accounts for 13% of the statements in my sample—the highest percentage in the “Comments Relevant to Gender Category.” What I find interesting about my

findings is that aside from times when Summitt's relationship with one of her players is the focus, virtually all of the statements in this category involve her relationship with *male* others—her father, her son, Geno Auriemma, Harry Peretta, etc. There is not a single mention of Summitt's relationship to a female coach or her mother (who is alive and well and attends games with the same frequency as her father). What I find most interesting in this category is the coverage and characterization of the Summitt/Auriemma relationship. During the years examined in my study one or the other's team won the national championship, so it would be expected for the media to focus on their coaching rivalry. But how they focus on the rivalry arguably has a lot more to do with gender than with coaching. And the media seems intent on examining and reporting on their relationship. What the media seems to find so salient is how they get along. In 2004, this was reported in the *Washington Post*,

Summitt was about a third of the way through her news conference Monday morning when the assembled media brought up the topic they'd been waiting to broach: her frosty relationship with Auriemma. Given both coaches' status in the game and the friendly if casual relationship they used to have, the supposed animosity that developed between them in the past few years remains a topic of much interest. Summitt got seven questions about the relationship, none stranger than this hypothetical: "What if you're driving down a dark highway in Tennessee, car broken down, it's Geno. Do you drive by, do you stop or do you drive by and call for help, and why?" "Well," Summitt replied after the laughing ceased, "I stop and ask if I can help him. Why wouldn't I? Reverse the role" (Reedy, J. 2004, April 6).

*USA Today* reported on this question/response as well in a story titled “Uconn vs. Tennessee in Title Game” (Patrick, D. 2004, April 6) but, unlike the *Washington Post*, reported that Auriemma was also given the same dark highway scenario. His response: “I hope she said that that was the dumbest question she’s ever heard. I hope she said that” (Reedy, J. 2004, April 5).

Why are seven questions including a hypothetical “scenario” that is in no way task-relevant being asked of these coaches in the last press conference before their championship game? Does Summitt feel obliged to answer them? It appears Auriemma does not. The problem for advancement of women’s athletics in society is the fact that national coverage in mainstream media tends to marginalize what have been great advances in the amount and quality of women’s sports in general and women’s basketball in particular. Since these newspapers are one of the few places that report on women’s college basketball in mainstream media, if this is the kind of coverage the women’s game is focused on how it is supposed to gain any sort of legitimacy in the public’s view?

Summitt’s relationship with Harry Perretta was also a point of interest to the media. I have already mentioned the “love triangle” story line in the “feminine apologetic” portion of this analysis. But I think the following examples belong here. When reporting on Summitt’s desire to learn about Perretta’s offense *The New York Times* reported on the friendship that developed out of their meeting. “Ever since that meeting last summer, Perretta and Summitt have become fast friends” (Berstein, V. 2003, April 3). The *Washington Post* devoted an entire article about their relationship titled “Two Coaches, Now Two Friends” (Orton, K. 2003, March 31) in which the implication is that it is their personal relationship that is more important than the fact that Summitt initiated contact with Perretta in order to learn the intricacies of an offense that she thought could beat the University of Connecticut. The relationship trumps the task-relevant reason for their communicating in the first place. Instead the readers learn that Summitt

invited Perretta's team to her house for a barbeque and that she hand delivered a tie that she had previously given him to the court so that he could wear it for a game.

The tendency of these newspapers to focus on Summitt's personal relationships with peers in her profession support Daddario's 1994 finding that one of the ways in which the accomplishments of females in sports are undermined is through marginalization. But more importantly the evidence tends to support Knight and Giuliano's (2003) idea of the feminine apologetic because the professional relationships on which they focus are with Summitt's male peers, not her female peers. Though the number varies, there are currently only four male coaches with women's teams ranked in Division I Top Twenty. And in the Southeastern Conference, the home conference to Summitt and the University of Tennessee (which consists of 12 teams) there is only one male coach—Andy Landers at the University of Georgia. In the Final Four games played in the six years encompassing my study, 13 different teams participated. Of those 13 teams only four had male coaches. Considering the dearth of male coaches with whom Summitt competes and the media's penchant for focusing on Summitt's relationships, one should expect to find some mention of *some* relationship with her female peers. Yet I found virtually *no* instances of Summitt interacting with her female peers at all. Is Summitt's relationship with her female peers simply not of interest to the media? Does Summitt have no relationships with her female counterparts? I argue, in support of previous research, that the media exaggerates the extent of her relationships with male peers specifically by heterosexualizing Summitt, and thereby they marginalize and trivialize her coaching role. At the same time, by spending so much time on the Summitt/Auriemma "rivalry," the accomplishments of female coaches whose coaching successes eclipses Auriemma's coaching success are rendered virtually invisible. Auriemma becomes the one man who by his team's victories over Summitt's team verifies the stereotypic notion that men are better coaches than

women are, even when they are coaching women.

### Reactive Objects

This category was taken from a study by Messner, Duncan and Jensen (1993) that examined gender stereotyping in televised sports by comparing how live, play-by-play television sports commentators talk about women's sports and women athletes with how they talk about men's sports and men athletes (220). In short, their findings suggest that the language used by commentators tends to subtly reinforce gender and racial stereotypes/hierarchies. Among their discoveries, Messner et. al found that "Men were framed as active agents in control of their destinies [and] women as reactive objects" (227-228).

I found no examples of Summitt being framed by any of these newspapers as a reactive object.

### Cooperative vs. Competitive

This category was also taken from Daddario's 1994 study exploring the marginalization of women athletes. She argues that although the mass media can help advance women's equality in sport they "fail to challenge the sexist ideology that pervades the institution of sport ... [that is] revealed through the hegemonic strategy of marginalization" (276). In examining the language of the sportscasters in the 1992 Winter Olympic Games, her rhetorical analysis concluded that women athletes were marginalized by the commentators in several ways, one of which was the sportscasters' tendency to present women athletes as typically cooperative versus men athletes as typically competitive" (282).

As with the "Reactive Objects" category, I found no instances of the *New York Times*, *USA Today* or the *Washington Post* characterizing Summitt as cooperative versus competitive.

Certainly competitiveness is an expected and positive quality in a coach and, as noted in the summary of my “Coaching Empowered Through Language” category, Summitt’s reputation as a fierce competitor is readily acknowledged by her peers and the media. I did find one statement in a 2003 *Washington Post* article titled “One-Upmanship for the Women; Tennessee Coaches Play Big-Game Mind Games” interesting because it speaks to Summitt’s competitiveness but at the same time was a response that Summitt gave to another question about her relationship with Auriemma. “Summitt, who publicly characterized Auriemma by saying he is combative whereas she is competitive, isn’t about to engage her rival in any real back-and-forth banter” (Watts, A. 2003, April 8). Coding statements the way I have for this study makes it clear that it is also informative to evaluate these statements within the context of the whole article when making evaluations on underlying meaning or message framing.

#### Task-Irrelevant

This potentially very broad analytical category is articulated in a study by Jones, Murrell and Jackson (1999) examining how beliefs regarding the sex typing of sport are likely to be reflected in the popular media’s portrayal of female athletes. They argue that descriptions of female athletic performance reflect dominant societal beliefs about gender. These scholars make the distinction between female-appropriate and male-appropriate sports (184). They argue that a sport like basketball is considered gender-inappropriate for women because the skills it requires are not skills that society expects or necessarily wants women to possess. The print media accounts examined in this study demonstrate that one method for devaluing the performance of female athletes in gender-inappropriate sports is “through a barrage of task-irrelevant statements and condescending comparisons to male athletes” (190). I coded 8% of the statements in my study as task-irrelevant, having nothing to do with tasks associated with

Summitt's coaching role.

*USA Today* reported that "Summitt, 50, grew up in a family that farmed and ran a general store in Henrietta, Tenn" (Patrick, D. 2003, April 8). The previous statement was in an article titled "Rivals Summitt Auriemma Two of a Kind" where readers also learned that Auriemma was the son of immigrants. The article did not however mention Auriemma's age, which was 48 at the time the article was written. On the whole, this article focused on task-irrelevant dimensions, specifically on her relationship with a male other, Geno Auriemma. The *New York Times* in 2003 reported, "Given the 'Evil Empire' barbs that Auriemma lobbed her way, Tuesday's defeat must have been as personally stinging for Summitt as it was professionally disappointing" (Araton, H. 2003, April 1). Perhaps this statement implies that Summitt was just as upset about being compared to Darth Vader as she was about losing the National Championship game. Somehow, I am not sure the two were equal in Summitt's mind.

Also in 2003, the *Washington Post* reported that "Washington Redskins Coach Steve Spurrier, a close friend of Tennessee Coach Pat Summitt, called her before the Duke game to wish her good luck this weekend" (Orton, K. 2003, April 8). Why is this information important? It is not only task-irrelevant but also once again focuses on her relationship with male others.

The *New York Times* in 1998 quoted Mimi Griffin, a long-time announcer for women's basketball. "Griffin said Summitt 'has been a different person this season.' She added: 'I've known her for 18 or 20 years. She's become kinder and gentler'" (Sandomir, R. 1998, March 28). In another *Times* article two days earlier this information was also reported: "Those around her say Summitt has mellowed this season" (Longman, J. 1998, March 26). Does the fact that some people have noticed that Summitt appears "kinder, gentler" or more "mellow" have anything to do with her coaching role? I posit that this information is important to report because these attributes are more gender-appropriate and therefore worth noting in two of the

14 *New York Times* articles appearing in 1998.

### Coaching Ability Marginalized Through Gendered Language

While the remaining six analytical categories still fall under the “Comments Relevant to Gender” group, each of these categories articulate ways in which a female athlete’s (or coach in Summitt’s case) accomplishments are marginalized or trivialized through the use of gendered language. In short these categories focus on *how* things are said versus *what* is said. The six categories under this umbrella are “first names” (Messner, Duncan & Jensen 1993; Kane & Greendorfer 1994), “infantilization” (Messner, Duncan and Jensen 1993), “non-parallel terms” (Blinde, Greendorfer & Shanker 1991), “ambivalent language” (Messner, Duncan and Jensen 1993), “condescending descriptors” (Daddario 1994), and “compensatory rhetoric” (Daddario 1994; Messner, Duncan & Jensen 1993). These six analytical categories are defined in each of their respective discussions and my findings for each category are discussed on the following pages.

#### First Names

This category is derived from a 1993 study by Messner, Duncan and Jensen titled “Separating the Men from the Girls: The Gendered Language of Televised Sports” that examined gender stereotyping by sports commentators in announcing live, play-by-play action in televised sports. The study, which focused on basketball and tennis coverage, found that women athletes were far more likely than the male athletes to be called by their first names in the tennis coverage. In the basketball programming both sexes were referred to by their first names but the only men referred to by first name were African-American. They argue that this tendency is one of the ways in which sport as an institution “simultaneously 1) constructs and

legitimizes men's overall power and privilege over women; and 2) constructs and legitimizes heterosexual, white, middle class men's power and privilege over subordinated and marginalized groups of men" (229).

My examination found that Summitt was called by her first name in 3% of the coded statements, but the majority of those sentences were direct quotes from other coaches or colleagues who would know her on a first-name basis. When Summitt spoke of her coaching peers, she likewise called them by first name. I found only three instances where the writer of the story referred to Summitt by her first name and these statements were made in the earliest years of my study (1997 and 1998). In 1997, Nancy Lieberman-Cline authored an article for *USA Today* and she wrote, "Pat is an inside-outside coach, though she's expanded her offense the last couple of years" (Lieberman-Klein, N. 1997, March 26). In this case the writer of the story is also a colleague of Summitt and therefore it is reasonable to expect that she might refer to Summitt by first name. The other two times Summitt was referred to by first name are the only two instances that arguably fall into the category for the reasons articulated by Messner et. al. *New York Times* reporter Richard Sandomir wrote, "Pat knows her impact. [...] Pat has adjusted to suit her team" (Sandomir, R. 1998, March 28). Since 1998 was the only time that Summitt's first name was used by a person who did not personally know her, the tendency to marginalize women athletes in this way has not occurred in my examination of these three newspapers in the way that Messner et. al found in the broadcast media. Perhaps people are more attentive to what they say in writing versus in covering an event live, in "real time," when the opportunity for editing does not really exist.

#### Infantilization

The same study that generated the name for the previous category (Messner, Duncan

and Jensen, 1993) also described a phenomenon they labeled “Infantilization,” my second category falling under the general “Coaching Ability Marginalized Through Gendered Language” label. In studying play-by-play commentary Messner et. al. noted what they called an “infantilization” of women athletes in the television broadcasts that were part of their study—women were referred to as “girls” and “young ladies,” whereas men were referred to as “men,” “young men” and “young fellas” (220). Their finding was consistent with a previous study by Blinde, Greendorfer and Shanker (1991) titled “Differential Media Coverage of Men’s and Women’s Intercollegiate Basketball: Reflection of Gender Ideology.”

I found no statements that infantilized Summitt in the way that these researchers found that female college athletes were. It is important to note that Summitt was 44 years old in the first year included in my study (1997) and was 50 in the most recent year of my study (2003). It might be considered a bit more blatantly sexist in this day and age to call a woman in Summitt’s age range a “girl” while it might be more easily forgiven when used to label a female college athlete whose age ranges from 18-21. Further studies could explore whether or not this infantilization as noted by previous scholars continues to be prevalent in current media coverage of female college athletes.

#### Non-parallel Terms

Another finding noted by the aforementioned 1993 study by Messner et. al. was the use of non-parallel terms to describe the actions and characterizations of male and female basketball players. A difference in terms used to describe the actions of basketball coaches was also found. Joe Ciampi (male coach of Auburn University’s women’s team) “yells” at his team, while Pat Summitt was described twice as “screaming” off the bench. “Screaming,” as the authors note, often implies lack of control, powerlessness, even hysteria (227). Male coaches were not

described in this manner.

Along with examples of Summitt's "hysteria" (i.e. screaming), I also placed statements in this category if I believed the word choice used by the reporter would not be one he or she would consider in describing a male coach doing the same thing. I found only 1% of the statements in my sample fell into this analytical category. In the earlier years of this study, Summitt was described as a screamer (as opposed to a yeller). In 1996 the *Washington Post* reported Summitt's reaction to one of her player's actions: "Summitt grabbed her by the jersey and screamed at her" (Frey, J. 1996, April 1). In 1998 the *New York Times* reported that "Tech cut the lead to 15 in the second half, a moral victory that made Summitt sweat, stomp and scream" (Smith, C. 1998, March 30). In 1997, the *Washington Post* reported the following: "After the game, Summitt tried to convince a roomful of sobbing players they were good enough to be playing in March. Apparently, her pleading worked" (Shipley, A. 1997, March 31). "Pleading," "Stomping" and "Screaming" are terms more associated with female gender stereotypes than with intensely competitive coaches.

The tendency to characterize Summitt in this hysterical/desperate/out-of-control-woman sort of way seemed to dissipate in the more recent years in my study to be replaced by even more subtle language that most readers probably do not notice. But I argue that word choice—especially when it is written—*is* intentioned and that one word is chosen over another on purpose. Certainly it can be asked to what purpose. I assert that the purpose, however subtle, can become clearer when a statement is considered in within the context of the entire story.

Concerning what I consider non-parallel word choices, I offer the following examples. The first has to do with an earlier-described request by Summitt to discuss with Harry Peretta a particular offense that he ran because she wanted to implement it. "Perretta, deep into his third decade at Villanova, the Princeton of the women's game, couldn't believe that a woman of

Summitt's stature, a Hall of Famer with six national titles, was soliciting him" (Aaraton, H. 2004, April 8). I placed this statement in this category because of what I consider the intentional use of the word "solicited" by the author to connote sexual overtones which were pervasive in this story titled "Sports of the Times: Friend Gets Tangled in Coaches Rivalry." (See the section describing the "feminine apologetic" category on page 80 for an in-depth discussion of this particular story.) If this were a male coach wishing to gain knowledge from another peer, I wonder if he would be described as soliciting the other coach?

A second example of non-parallel word choice is from a 2004 *New York Times* article that is describing Summitt's ascension to coaching greatness. "She [Summitt] grew along with the women's sports movement, building the three-peat powerhouse around Chamique Holdsclaw in the mid 1990's, climaxing with her last title and an unbeaten season in 1998" (Tennessee Sets Trap." 2004, April 5). It is the use of the word "climaxing" in this example that I find an interesting choice, again a word with sexual connotations. Why not use a less sexually charged word like "culminating," for example ? When Auriemma coached his UConn women to a three-peat, I wonder what word was used to describe his accomplishment—"submitting" perhaps?

#### Ambivalent Language

Messner, Duncan and Jensen (1993) are also responsible for this analytical category. In their previously described study concerning coverage of men's and women's college basketball, they found that verbal attributions of strength to women were often stated in ambivalent language which "undermined or neutralized" the words conveying power and strength (226). I coded 4% of the statements in my sample as falling into this category, and statements that I coded here were statements that, while they said something empowering or positive characterizing

Summitt's coaching role, inserted language into the statement that served to neutralize the characterization of Summitt as a strong coach.

In an article titled "Three cheers for Tubby Smith, Pat Summitt, Dick Vitale," the author states, "It blows my mind that Summitt won her third consecutive championship and sixth title in her tenure in Volunteers country" ("Three Cheers." 1998, April 1). In reporting on the fact that Summitt was the first women's (or men's) college basketball coach to accomplish this three-peat, the author subtly (or not) undermines the accomplishment with the phrase "it blows my mind." Is the accomplishment so unfathomable for a woman that it has messed with the author's head? The underlying message could be that Summitt's accomplishment was simply a fluke.

In another *USA Today* story also reporting on Summitt's third consecutive championship, the author writes, "Summitt, the elegant, intense woman with the piercing blue eyes, has created the greatest college basketball dynasty since John Wooden" (Patrick, D. 1998, March 30). In using the words "elegant" and "intense" right next to each other, Patrick has effectively neutralized or trivialized Summitt's coaching role—"intense"—by characterizing her in a gendered way—"elegant;" and the fact that he chose to place the word that is more associated with a woman's proper gender role before the word more associated with a good coach serves to indicate which is more valued by the author and, arguably, society. The reader is reminded that Summitt is first and foremost a woman even as her coaching accomplishments are aligned with the best of her male peers.

In 1997 *The Washington Post* reported on another of Summitt's national championship victories and has this to say:

How does Tennessee Coach Pat Summitt respond to winning a second consecutive NCAA women's basketball title and record

fifth overall? How does she celebrate? As the clock confirmed Tennessee's 68-59 victory over Old Dominion tonight, in a game that mirrored Tennessee's excruciatingly slow-developing season, Summitt dropped her head and slumped shoulders. This wasn't revelry. It was relief (Shipley, A. 1997, March 31).

In this example, *The Washington Post* has characterized Summitt at the *very moment* of accomplishing a major coaching feat with language more often associated with defeat. In the above story and in others, each of these newspapers reported the following Summitt quote.

“When asked how the season had affected her, she replied: ‘I’ve aged’” (Climer, D. 1997, April 1). This particular season Summitt had coached a team that had lost 10 games during the regular season to a national championship victory. While today this 1997 season has been characterized as the greatest in her career from a sheer coaching perspective, at the time the media focused on her aging comment.

### Condescending Descriptors

This category name is taken from the 1994 work of Daddario whose rhetorical analysis examined the strategies used by mass media in “fashioning a masculine sports hegemony” (278). Her examination of CBS’s coverage of the 1992 Winter Olympic Games suggests that the female elite athlete is, to some extent, still a cultural reproduction of the sexist ideology that pervades the sports industry. Her study concluded that women athletes were marginalized by the commentators in a number of ways among which is the use of “condescending descriptors that trivialized women’s achievements” (282).

I coded 2% of the statements in my sample into this category. In the earlier years covered by my study, the media occasionally portrayed Summitt as a wicked or evil

“stepmother.” This characterization began in 1996 as the result of the following incident involving Summitt and Michelle Marciniak, her point guard at the time. Marciniak and Summitt reportedly had an intense relationship, one that Summitt described as mother-daughter in March 1996 (Frey, J. 1996, April 1).

One of their most famous clashes came last season, when Marciniak (nicknamed Spinderella) made a three-point shot, then slacked off and allowed a layup at the other end of the court. As Marciniak ran back down the floor, Summitt grabbed her by the jersey and screamed [non-parallel-language—yell vs. scream] at her. A picture of that moment ran in several newspapers. One Knoxville reporter dubbed the twosome “Spinderella and her evil stepmother” (Frey, J. 1996, April 1).

This Knoxville reporter’s comment was the first characterization (in my sample) of Summitt as some sort of wicked stepmother but not the last. All three newspapers reported some version of this incident and a *USA Today* reporter picked up the theme by titling an article on Tennessee’s 1996 national championship win “Fairy-tale Ending Arrives for Spinderella.” The first line of the story states, “The story of Spinderella and her wicked stepmother came to one of those happily ever-after endings Sunday for Tennessee’s women’s basketball team” and continues with the fairy-tale motif (Wier, T. 1996, April 1). This treatment of Summitt (and Marciniak) by all of these newspapers is a clear example of the use of condescending descriptors intended to marginalize and trivialize the accomplishment of Summitt and her team.

In 1998, the stepmother resurfaces in a *New York Times* article. “If not for glimpses of Summitt with her son, Tyler, or riding a tractor on her parents’ farm or dancing after the Lady Vols won the title, you’d think these players were commanded by Bobby Knight’s stepmother”

(Sandomir, R. 1998, March 28). In this example of a condescending descriptor, the fact that Summitt is specifically referred to as Bobby Knight's stepmother lets anyone familiar with Bobby Knight know that she must be particularly evil. Although Bobby Knight is recognized as one of college basketball's coaching greats, he is also a controversial figure because of his uncontrollable emotional outbursts and sometimes downright meanness towards his players. If he is an evil character, one can only imagine the wickedness of *his* stepmother.

Another example of a condescending descriptor with a fairy-tale image from 2004. "This isn't to depict Tennessee, of all schools, and Summitt, of all coaches, as Cinderella in sweats, or to forget the endgame assist they received against Baylor from bumbling officials in the Round of 16" (Zinser, L. 2004, April 5). During the particular time frame of my study, the most prevalent condescending descriptors of Summitt involved fairy-tale characterizations or analogies. One reason these particular characterizations are interesting is that in college basketball—particularly for the men—there exist the "Cinderella" teams which are those teams that get much further in the tournament (sometimes even winning it all) than anyone expected perhaps because they didn't have the talent or the coaching. Regarding Summitt's career, it has come to be expected that her team will be a contender—at least make it to the Final Four—in the NCAA championship tournament. So in "normal" (male) basketball parlance, neither she nor her teams are "Cinderellas." Instead she is characterized as an evil or wicked stepmother in several of the articles in my sample.

### Compensatory Rhetoric

The last of my analytical categories was taken from the previously mentioned study by Messner, Duncan and Jensen (1993) that examined gender stereotyping in televised sports. Among their discoveries, they found that female athletes were much more likely than male

athletes that to be framed as failures due to some individual shortcoming like a lack of confidence, a lack of aggression or a lack of stamina (227). They called such framing compensatory rhetoric. Men were far less often framed as failures due to their own “lack” but rather appeared to miss shots or lose games because of the power, strength and intelligence of their opponents. According to the authors, “[t]his framing of failure suggests that it is the thoughts and actions of the male victor that wins games, rather than suggesting that the loser’s lack of intelligence or ability is responsible for losing games” (228).

While I found no examples of Summitt being framed by any of these newspapers as failing because of some individual shortcoming, I did find instances (very few) where Summitt blamed herself for her team’s failure and I coded these statements in this section. The statements account for only .5% on my sample. In 1997, *USA Today* reported,

She [Summitt] faults herself for some heavy scheduling. “There were times I blamed myself, but I never told them” [...] “I didn’t exactly set up this team like they probably should have been set up after a national championship,” says Summitt, whose team was seeded No. 3 in its region after nine seasons as a No. 1. (Mihoces, G. 1997, March 27).

The only thing I find a bit surprising is that because one of Summitt’s major coaching tenets is that in order to be the best you must play the best and also play in hostile environments, it seems out of character for her to find fault with heavy scheduling.

The fact that there are so few examples in this category could be regarded as a positive one, but it is important to point out that in the time frame that my study encompassed (six years of March Madness), Summitt only lost three games, so there was not much failure (at least task-relevant failure) for which to find someone/something to blame.

To summarize this sub-group, the six categories under the umbrella of “Coaching Ability Marginalized Through Gendered Language” combined for a total of 10.5% of the statements coded for this study. Though the percentage is relatively small, these categories combine with the seven categories under the “Gender Role More Salient than Coaching Role Category” that account for 29.5% of the entire sample. Together these two umbrella groups combine to form the overarching Comments Relevant to Gender” grouping that accounts for 40% of the total sample.

### Summary of Significant Findings

I chose to focus my research upon six years of “March Madness” newspaper coverage during which Summitt’s team either competed in or won the national championship—a time when one would expect the *New York Times*, *The Washington Post* and *USA Today*, to devote enough sports coverage of this highly successful women’s college basketball team and coach to provide an effective way to accomplish my objective; namely, to determine the extent to which Summitt’s portrayal by the press reflects the broader gender ideology of the society in which we live. This ideology privileges men over women, serving to maintain the status quo. The world of sport is a powerful cultural outlet in supporting this hegemonic strategy because, as Kane and Greendorfer (1994) assert, sport and media portrayals of sport uphold “a power structure in which males and male athletes are perceived and portrayed as different from (sexual and gender difference) and better than (gender hierarchy) females and female athletes” (30). What follows is a summary of my significant findings.

From a statistical point of view, it was encouraging to find close to 60% of the statements analyzed were “Relevant to Coaching” and 35% of those were “task-relevant”—that is, related to Summitt’s coaching. By far the most interesting finding under the general heading

of comments relevant to coaching was that Summitt herself was responsible for a majority (65%) of published “task-relevant” comments—signifying the importance of having a forum in which to be heard (i.e., press conferences and interviews).

The reporting of “facts” (9% of the comments relevant to coaching) was revealed as important because the facts dealt primarily with Summitt’s skills and accomplishments, serving to legitimize and validate her in her role as coach. Such statements place her on a par with—if not superior to—the best of her coaching colleagues (male and female) and can be a valuable tool in diminishing the effects of gender stereotyping prevalent in so much of the coverage of female athletes (and coaches).

The “neutral” category (8% of comments relevant to coaching) is where statements not specifically related to Summitt’s skill or performance as a coach but nonetheless relevant to coaching were placed. These statements tended to be speculative or innocuous in nature while neither detrimental nor supportive of Summitt as a coach, and thus they had little relevance in terms of study outcomes.

Language was an interesting category in that I chose to differentiate between empowering and dismissive language in my analysis. I wanted to see the extent to which language was used to validate my subject in her coaching role (especially since she is in a traditionally “gender-inappropriate” sport). I included comments couched in language that was empowering for Summitt as a coach (6% of “relevant” statements) under the general heading of Comments Relevant to Coaching. Most comments included here used words such as “masterful,” “brilliant” and “powerful” to characterize Summitt’s coaching, words likely to be used to describe a successful male coach and thus representing a positive and encouraging finding.

Also, I wanted to see whether language was used to denigrate Summitt in ways similar to those found in previous studies either through *what* was said about her or *how* it was said.

These strategies comprise the remaining analytical categories of my study and, statistically speaking, 40% of the statements analyzed in my study were “Relevant to Gender” and many, if not most, are consistent with findings gleaned from the literature review of women’s World Cup Soccer, Olympics and NCAA basketball media coverage. In this portion of my study, almost 30% of the statements fell into the “Gender More Salient” grouping of categories, with just over 10% falling into the “Coaching Ability Marginalized through Gendered Language” grouping of categories. I will summarize my findings in each of these two groupings

Of the seven categories grouped under “Gender More Salient,” two—“relationships with others” and “task-irrelevant”—combined to account for almost three-quarters of all comments where gender was presented as more salient than coaching. A major finding in the “relationship with others” category is that Summitt’s relationships with men were covered to the virtual exclusion of her relationships with women—even though she coaches a women’s basketball team and most of her coaching colleagues are women. Of NCAA Division I basketball’s top twenty women’s teams, sixteen are coached by women and four by men, a fact suggesting that press coverage focused on Summitt’s relationships with others would include female coaches who are her peers. That was not the case.

The three newspapers in my sample emphasize Summitt’s relationships with men, particularly ones that validate her heterosexuality and/or portray her in a subordinate position, thereby validating earlier findings that a woman athlete (or coach) is likely to be portrayed as a heterosexual woman first and foremost and only secondarily as an athlete (coach).

It is also significant that her relationships with male peers are portrayed as personal, not professional, and are characterized in stereotypical male/female terms. In the “task-irrelevant” category, the findings are virtually identical, with the focus firmly trained upon Summitt as a female person rather than on Summitt as a championship winning basketball coach. It should be

noted that in my sample most comments of this nature came out of responses given to press conference questions apparently posed to pursue the relationship angle. The major findings in both these categories confirm Daddario's 1994 conclusion that one way to trivialize and demean the accomplishments of a woman in sports is to marginalize the person.

About one-quarter of the results in the "gender more salient" grouping fell into these three categories: "little girl syndrome," "feminine apologetic" and "feminizes content of accomplishment." Of particular note in these categories is that most, if not all could also have been categorized into the "relationship with others" category in that they all dealt in one way or another with Summitt's relationships (mostly) with men. The differentiation is significant in several respects, however. The first, "little girl syndrome," cast Summitt into a clearly subordinate role, specifically that of daddy's "little girl," with the implications associated with that—love and approval seeking, powerlessness, submission—and these were the things played up in press coverage. The second, "feminine apologetic," focused coverage upon assuring readers of the heterosexuality of the female athlete (or, in Summitt's case, coach) in a gender-inappropriate sport (basketball) where suspicions linger that such athletes tend to be lesbians. Again, this was accomplished by portraying Summit as properly feminine in her relationships with men. The third, "feminizes content of accomplishment," focuses upon trivializing accomplishments by playing up gender. Most telling in this category was the 1996 story about a member of her 1996 championship team where the story emphasis was shifted to recruitment of the player six years earlier—the occasion where Summitt went into labor and had to leave to give birth to her son. In each of these categories, by one means or another, Summitt was portrayed by the press in a gender-appropriate fashion.

A few of the categories derived from earlier studies and used to marginalize female athletes did not come into play in press coverage of Coach Summitt. Specifically, none of the

comments in the “Gender more Salient” grouping fell into the category of “reactive objects”—a category for comments casting Summitt as more a reactive object than an active agent (signifying the stereotypical characterization of women as passive rather than aggressive) or “cooperative vs. competitive”—a category for comments treating Summitt in accordance with the widely held notion of women as cooperative and men as competitive. It is encouraging that comments of these sorts were not found in my examination of Summitt’s press coverage.

In the “Coaching Ability Marginalized through Gendered Language” grouping of categories “relevant to gender” the major findings can be summarized without going in to detailed discussion of each category. None of the comments fell into the category of “infantilization”—where comments using language to infantilize women athletes (with words such as “girl” versus “woman”) would have been placed. It would have been surprising at best and outrageous at worse to apply such characterizations to a mature (read over 40) and highly successful coach (albeit, a woman) competing in NCAA Division I basketball championship games. What is distressing is that such characterizations persist in coverage of younger female athletes competing at the Olympic level. It would be interesting to examine whether younger female coaches in Division I basketball at present, like Pokey Chatman from LSU, are likely to be marginalized through use of the “little girl syndrome.”

In the “first names” category, findings in the press coverage I looked at show that when Summitt’s first name was used it was appropriate because those people quoted as using her first name were acquainted with her. There were no instances when her first name was used to diminish her coaching accomplishments.

Gendered language has been used to diminish Summitt’s coaching accomplishments through the use of “non-parallel terms” such as “screaming” for Summitt and “yelling” for a rival male coach; through “ambivalent language” such as “elegant, intense woman” and

descriptions implying that coaching exacts a heavy personal toll on her (as a woman); through “condescending descriptors” such as “evil stepmother” and other fairy tale descriptors; and, through “compensatory rhetoric”, where women athletes are personally blamed for failure (though the only comments falling into this category came from Summitt blaming herself for a team failure).

In short, my study during six years of “March Madness” shows that gendered language continues to be used against women but is not as blatant for a highly successful coach (Summitt) as for younger women athletes involved as players in women’s World Cup soccer, Olympics and NCAA basketball. This leads me to posit that maturity and success plays some role in diminishing the use of at least the most derogatory language used to keep women in their gender-appropriate place. What is distressing is that a significant portion (40%) of press coverage accorded a top ranked female coach still presents gender as more relevant than job (coaching). If this is true for Summitt—Olympic medalist and coach, Hall of Famer, and winningest coach in the history of NCAA Division I basketball—how can successful women athletes and coaches who have not attained the pinnacle of success achieved by Summitt hope to receive fair and equitable treatment by the press?

### Conclusion

As the top coach in the history of NCAA Division I Basketball, Pat Summitt can and should be a powerful figure in dispelling the notion that women cannot succeed in competitive sport. And Summitt’s outstanding record of performance as athlete and coach should insure a portrayal of her to the public that is reflective of that record of achievement. Unfortunately, the newspapers targeted for my examination fell short of providing equitable coverage of Coach Summitt’s performance—in either quality or quantity—during the time covered by my study.

Even though I was examining coverage during “March Madness,” the time when men’s and women’s basketball receives more coverage by the national media, the women’s games were underrepresented, providing evidence of “symbolic annihilation” as described by Birrell & Theberge (1994) whereby women athletes are erased from view, communicating that female athletes are not an important presence in our society (347). Overall, the women’s tournament received only 30% of the coverage that the men received.

Concerning the coverage that Summitt received, the results suggest that Summitt is oftentimes characterized in ways that marginalize and trivialize her coaching accomplishments. The findings also suggest that even as women succeed in the male-dominated world of sport, especially gender-inappropriate sport, societal pressures require that they be presented as properly gendered heterosexual females. Additionally, my results suggest that Summitt herself both empowers *and* marginalizes her coaching role.

The findings validate—unfortunately—a number of the conclusions I drew from review of the Olympics media coverage. Perhaps it is not too surprising that Pat Summitt—herself an Olympic medalist and coach—was subjected to substantially the same treatment other female Olympic competitors received from the media. The relevant conclusions are presented in the following statements. 1) Summitt’s feminine attributes and behaviors are often emphasized over her coaching performance. 2) Even in articles primarily devoted to her coaching, language is often used in subtle and not so subtle ways to deflect attention from achievement and, in effect, marginalize and trivialize her performance as coach. 3) Also of concern is that winning and being successful in sport is less a determining factor in the type and quantity of media exposure than gender.

It is important to recognize the potential power Summitt possesses to move public perception of the traditional boundaries of women’s sport. She is, after all, not just involved in a

traditionally “gender inappropriate” sport, but is a strong and successful presence there—which also marks her as a significant threat to the entrenched ideology of “male dominance” of the game. As a coach with the ability to participate in press conferences, Summitt should possess more power over her portrayal by the media than team athletes possess, though she has utilized this opportunity with mixed results. While much if not most of the relevant and positive press coverage of Summitt can be attributed directly to her own statements, there have also been times when she provided fodder for reporters looking for irrelevancies to pursue in print. And though coaches have little if any control over the questions posed to them in interviews and press conferences, they do have the power to choose whether and how to respond.

This study is the first of its kind to explore how a female coach is presented, and the fact that Summitt has the opportunity to speak for herself via press conferences may or may not influence the number of task-relevant statements versus task-irrelevant statements made about her. This is also the first study to include task-relevant statements in its analysis. The studies in my literature reviewed only looked at the ways in which female athletes were marginalized and trivialized, not at the ways in which they might have been empowered. Future research could be designed to compare occurrences of task-relevant to task-irrelevant statements made by or about female athletes in order to see how the ratio compares to my findings.

Language is a subtle and not so subtle means of enforcing and maintaining the status quo. My analysis revealed that the language used in coverage of Summitt in her role as coach was less stereotypically gender related than that found in the broadcast media studies covered in the literature review. I suggest reasons for this include: 1) the fact that Summitt—as a mature woman and championship winning coach—is less vulnerable to these characterizations than younger female athletes still competing as players, and 2) more time and reflection goes into selecting the appropriate word to support the message you wish to convey in writing than in

speaking. (This particular hypothesis could be tested in future research by looking at statements made about Summitt in the broadcast media during the same time frame.)

Cohen (2001), one of the authors reviewed earlier, characterized sports coverage in a way that made an impression upon me and bears repeating. Basically it is that sport is used to sell newspapers and magazines, attract corporate sponsors and boost television ratings, while sports coverage creates interest and demand for sport, promotes athletes and develops heroes and heroines. This characterization deals with a media outlet's economic interests and the ramifications of the choices it makes—i.e., what, who and how sports will be presented in its marketplace. I leave others to consider media economic interests; I am more interested in the impact of sports coverage. My research into national press coverage of Coach Summitt reflects my more general concern about women in sport—particularly, to paraphrase Cohen, the extent to which press coverage creates interest and demand for women's competitive sports events, promotes female athletes and develops heroines (read role models).

My findings confirm that a significant portion (40%) of press coverage devoted to Summitt is related to gender and, more specifically, to maintaining traditional stereotypes of the female's place in society. These findings are especially disappointing because press coverage (at least in the NCAA Division I basketball tournament) is trending downward. The number of participating women's teams doubled over the six years of my study (from 32 to 64, to equal the number of men's teams) while coverage of the women's teams fell from 30% in 1996 and 1997 to 26% in 2003 and 2004. From this fact alone, I see no excuse for devoting so much of the paltry press coverage of women's sports to upholding gender stereotypes and conclude that the press is more interested in maintaining the status quo than in providing equity in its coverage of Summitt in particular and women athletes and athletics in general.

Conclusions I have drawn from my in-depth look at press coverage accorded Summitt

and the ramifications I see for women in sport (athletes and coaches alike) are laid out in the following statements. First, media coverage (or lack thereof) of women athletes and athletics continues to perpetuate the view that competitive team sports are properly the domain of men and does little to create awareness of women's sports, much less interest in and demand for women's sports coverage among the general public. Second, a female athlete or coach, even at the pinnacle of success, can expect to be portrayed more according to gender than to playing ability or coaching ability, potentially rendering her ineffective as a role model (heroine) for aspiring young female athletes and coaches. Until female athletes and coaches can be covered by the mainstream media in ways that do not marginalize and trivialize their accomplishments, society's general view that participation in sports remains a right for men and boys and a privilege for girls and women will remain intact along with traditional gender stereotypes.

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